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Mysteries

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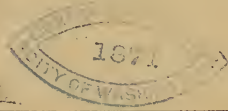
An Essay

ON

Mysteries.

BY

THE REV. THOMAS LOWE, B. A.



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TO THE
LATE WARDENS OF SAINT PETER'S CHURCH,
OLDHAM,
JAMES MAYERS TAYLOR & KAY CLEGG, ESQUIRES,
AND TO THE
ONE THOUSAND AND SEVENTY ONE OTHER OF THE INHABITANTS
OF OLDHAM
WHO SIGNED THE MEMORIAL OF REGRET,
THE FOLLOWING WORK
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED BY THE AUTHOR:
WHO THUS
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE KINDNESS,
ALIKE UNEXPECTED AND UNSOUGHT,
WHICH HAS LED THEM TO DESIRE THAT HE MAY BE
RE-ESTABLISHED AMONG THEM IN A MORE FIRM POSITION;
WITHOUT ANY RECOMMENDATION,
EXCEPT THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS FORMER EFFORTS;
AND WITH NO OTHER INDUCEMENT,
THAN THE EXPECTATION OF HIS FUTURE USEFULNESS;
WHICH HOPE
(THROUGH THE DIVINE ASSISTANCE)
MAY HE BE ENABLED TO REALIZE AND FULFIL.
THOMAS LOWE.

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**“That a Revelation contains Mysteries
forms no solid argument against its truth.”**

Revelation ; or, Light and Darkness.

By a Revelation we here mean a declaration of God's will to his rational creatures, in addition to what they are, by the light of nature, enabled to discover. It is the communication to us of what we term a Religion. By the *truth* of a Revelation is here meant, at present, its genuineness ; its right or title to the character which it claims, of having proceeded from God. No one who admits this definition of a Revelation, that it is a communication of the Supreme Being, (and we take for granted that the *possibility* of such a communication is admitted)

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will doubt for a moment its truth,^a in the sense of its containing authentic statements, or, in other words, will impugn its *veracity*, provided he is really convinced that it is a *Revelation*; to do so is in fact to deny that it is one at all, just as to assert that a triangle has not three sides, is to deny that it is a *triangle* at all. (See note.) *Veracity*, is of the essence of a *Revelation*, according to our definition. Those

^a It may be proper to remark, that there are, in fact, four senses in which the word *truth* is used.

First—Where the *assertion* corresponds with the state of the *case*, which is commonly called *logical truth*.

Second—Where the *assertion* corresponds with the *belief* of the individual who makes it, which is generally termed *moral truth*.

Third—As synonymous with *genuine* and opposed to *spurious*.

And fourth—As synonymous with *real* and opposed to *shadowy*; as in the expression “I am the way, the truth, and the light”—JOHN xiv. 6. where the ἀλήθεια is opposed to the *shadowy* representations of the former dispensation; and as “A member of the true Tabernacle”—HEB. viii. 2. where *true* signifies *real*, as opposed to *typical*.

The third and fourth usages of this term, it will be observed, are closely allied.

therefore who impugn the truth of a Revelation must be presumed to mean that through some flaw in the evidence, or other difficulty, the document which purports to be such, is not to be considered genuine. Now there is one apparent difficulty which some assert that no amount of evidence in favour of genuineness is sufficient to overcome, and that any antecedent improbability respecting this point, is never to be removed by any external probability on the other side. They make this difficulty moreover to lie in the existence of what are commonly termed mysteries, and they affirm that, “a document professing to be a Revelation, and yet found to contain such, may on good grounds be judged spurious :—that no further argument is needed against its genuineness, and that no amount of external evidence, can redeem it from the imputation of being a forgery.”

Let it be supposed, then, that there is in our hands a document professing to be a real Revelation, and that, on examination of certain external evidence, we acquiesce in this claim, and that we think we can moreover discern a har-

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mony between the contents of this document, and the character which it claims, it is denied that such a harmony does exist, and after the objector has taken for granted that the perception of such harmony by us is a necessary preliminary before we can admit its claims, he proceeds to demand that every part of this document be fully comprehensible by our understanding ; and if the contrary of this be admitted or proved, its claims, he asserts, must fall to the ground. The probability that the document is genuine, so far, as that can be made out by external evidence, is granted by him, but a stand is made on the sole ground, that because some of the statements which it contains are mysterious, this external evidence is invalidated, and the document must be considered spurious. This, then, is the objection which we have here to meet and to combat ; and in doing so, we shall consider it first absolutely, and without reference to any particular revelation, or document claiming to be such ; its general bearing having then been considered, we shall make an application of the principles which we may elicit, to the

only documents of that kind in which we feel interested, viz :—those which profess to reveal the Christian religion, *and shew that the mysteries which they contain form no solid argument against their truth.*

Although we have hitherto used the term *mystery* without explanation, it will be seen that we have confined ourselves exclusively to that sense of the word in which the opponents of a Revelation found their objection. Other significations it undoubtedly has, which will be hereafter considered, but in shewing that the existence of mysteries in a Revelation furnishes no warrant to attack its genuineness, we shall be careful to use the term in precisely the same sense in which it is employed by our opponents. We do not think that the question at issue may be resolved into a mere verbal dispute about the meaning of the word *mystery*, and that the truth will be arrived at by explaining it away in such a manner as to soften its apparent harshness ; to admit, for example, that there are mysteries in any particular Revelation, but that its opponents attach *one* idea to the term, and we

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another—that if their meaning be the correct one, their position is tenable, but that our explanation being admitted, their alarms will vanish. On the contrary we believe that the point at issue is concerning things, that the dispute is *real*, not *verbal*, that both parties may be considered to attach the same signification to the term, and that the *thing signified*, and not *the sign*, is by them held to prove the spuriousness of the document in which it may be found.

By mystery, then, both parties here understand a statement which involves matters above our comprehension. There is frequently a confusion, it may be proper to remark, attending this usage of the term, it being made sometimes to stand for the statement that expresses the fact, and sometimes for the fact itself. To both of these the term incomprehensible is popularly applied. We say, *e. g.* (to borrow an instance from the Christian Revelation,) “that the doctrine of the Trinity is incomprehensible,” *i. e.* the statement or proposition in which the fact is conveyed to us is so, and we say also that “the Trinity is incomprehensible.” Of these two usages of the

term the former is the correct one, but the distinction here laid down will not affect our argument. A mystery, then, is a statement or proposition presented to the mind for its assent, but in which we fail to discern the full propriety and truth of the *nexus* between the different terms, or in other words, where we cannot entirely perceive the congruity between the subject and the predicate of the proposition in which the fact is announced. In some cases we even think we see a disparity or incongruity, but this is not always so, and seems not therefore essential to the notion of a mystery. It may be called the oracular enunciations of a truth wherein the simple fact (or being) is asserted, and the *modus* or manner of being is suppressed ; where in familiar language, the *what* (*Quid*) is told us, but the *how* (*Quomodo*) is left untold, and which for lack of such Revelation is not merely unknown, but is at present unknowable. Moreover it claims to be believed not for any seeming truth involved in it, but solely through good faith in the general veracity of him who said it. This is what Theologians

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commonly call the Ecclesiastical meaning of the term *mystery*, and is the sense in which our opponents understand it.

A Revelation may contain Mysteries.

IF previous to a Revelation being delivered into our hands, we were to speculate on its nature and contents, it is probable that our conjectures would be very far wide of the mark. We might look for information in it regarding the Being who granted it, or regarding ourselves, regarding the relation that exists between both parties, or regarding the practical bearing which such a relation must have on man. Some in short would expect to find in it ample information on all those curious and intricate questions respecting the Divine Being with which they had themselves, it may be, felt perplexed; whilst others would probably look rather for a code of laws to guide their course through the intricacies which here beset them in their moral path.

Of these various sects of expectants no one could be positively sure till the Revelation actually took place, that his own views were correct, and no one, therefore, would be justified in maintaining his own peculiar hypothesis after the publication of the Revelation, unless on inspection this hypothesis was found to be in accordance with the fact as revealed. If then to have pronounced authoritatively in the midst of the previous uncertainty, on what the expected Revelation ought to contain, would have been deemed rash and presumptuous, equally unwarrantable would it be after its publication and avowal of its object and end, to cavil at it for not having accommodated itself to the particular views of any one set of expectants, were confessedly no satisfactory data existed to ensure accuracy to their anticipations.

The Revelation would, it may fairly be assumed, state the distinct object it had in view, and those who criticised its various parts without reference to that object, would be censurable

for the absurdity to which we have already alluded, viz. of virtually ascribing to it an object of their own invention, and trying it by that. It is evident, therefore, if the Revelation distinctly avowed, *e. g.* that its object was practical, the individual who looked for mere speculative information would not be justified in withholding his assent to its claims, simply on the ground that his expectations had not been fulfilled, seeing that all along he had nothing but his own preconceived and imaginary standard of propriety to guide him in forming such expectations; and still less would he be excusable if, without coming to any conclusion about the real object of the Revelation, or even whether it had any real object or no, he reject it for no other reason than because in some parts of the document he found what seemed to clash with his unfounded anticipations. We must conclude, then, that in every document which professes to contain a Revelation from the Supreme Being, it behoves us to look to its professed end and avowed object, and see whether its various parts do not really conspire towards the fulfillment of that end,—at least it is our duty to forbear to criti-

cise these parts separately and without reference to their position and use; but to admit the necessity of such reference, before we can, with certainty, decide not only that these parts are so superfluous as not only to merit culling out, but to justify us in casting aside the document altogether.

In contending for this conclusion, we advance no more than what is judged right in the ordinary concerns of human life. We do not attempt, *e. g.* to criticise the structure of any machine, or decide upon the aptness or unaptness of its several parts, until we know the use to which it is to be applied. The inside of a *watch* would present to us, at first sight, but an unmeaning series of movements and contrivances if we knew not to what end they all conspired; and even after being let into the secret, we should probably be still unable to trace with precision the mode in which they all bore upon the single point; we should see several wheels in the interior, in more or less rapid motion, and the final cause of such evolutions would not become apparent until the hands on the face had darkly revealed it,—I say

darkly, for even *then*, without farther information, we could not find out that their motion round a graduated circle, was in the slightest degree connected with the measuration of time. One who in this state of ignorance then, presumed to condemn or even to criticise the movements which he beheld, would justly be regarded by us, as hasty and rash in his censure, even though we ourselves failed to explain, with perfect accuracy, those parts which he, from his ignorance of their uses, had condemned. In all such cases the rule is simply this :--that we bear in mind the *end*, whilst we judge of the *means*. To explain may not be in the direction of that to which the Revelation is aimed, and this, it will be granted, is at least possible, whilst to prove the contrary is impossible, viz. that the Revelation in arriving at its aim must pass through an explanation of the mysteries. Let us, in illustration of these remarks, take the case of a schoolmaster teaching arithmetic. The instructor asserts the coincidence of the result of an operation with the *modus operandi* which he prescribes, and he is believed by his pupil, on extrinsic and independent evidence, *i. e.* the

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general veracity of his character, to tell the truth, when he asserts that the result will, if the operation be conducted according to his will, always prove true. Here it may not enter into his design to convey to his pupil at present the reason or theory of the operation. What his reasons for such concealment may be, we need not at present inquire, but every one will admit, that it would be absurd if the pupil, for lack of such explanation, should reject the rule which is put into his hands, and refuse to consider his teacher as a trust-worthy person.

A Revelation must contain Mysteries.

IN the previous reasoning it has been my object to shew that a Revelation *may* contain mysteries, by pointing out a possible condition under which the explanation of them would form no part of the end for which it took place ; thus, that for anything we can tell beforehand, it may be entirely practical in its aim, and properly reject the exposition of merely speculative truths. We may, however, go a step farther, and assert, that of all the purposes for which we can conceive a Revelation to be granted, a practical end is the only one which we can reconcile with the character of its author ; for we cannot, (I say,) conceive that the Deity would grant us a Revelation solely for the purpose of adding to our store of scientific information, that he would condescend to interfere with our researches, and instruct us regarding the motions of the Heavenly bodies, or the various tribes of dwellers on our planet, still less that His interference would take place

for the purpose of unfolding to us the hidden properties of His own nature, unless that development should act on us in such a manner as to make us wiser and better. Even unassisted reason can tell us that to “do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God,” is more truly ennobling than even the discoveries of a Newton, and that a Revelation tending to promote the exercise of such deeds, would bear on its front a more genuine impress of Divinity than that which should merely confine itself to questions that leave our moral nature as they find it. In such a Revelation we should speedily detect something wanting ; the puny soul of man would feel unsatisfied with such unsubstantial food, his heart would be chilled, and he would quickly come to the conclusion that such discussions ill correspond with what ought to be the intercourse between God and His natural moral offspring. In a word, whoever looks to the condition of human nature, must confess that a Revelation which should simply inform of things *to be known*, not of things *to be done*, had left its work imperfect and unfinished, and thus no interposition can be conceived worthy of the

Supreme Being, which does not assume the character of a guide. A Revelation must act the part of a lantern. It must fulfil that office in the moral world, which the sun performs in the physical; *i. e.* direct our steps, that so we may walk without stumbling. A Revelation may be fitly called a “light.” But, to continue in the words of a learned writer of the present day,^b “it is a light to see by, not to gaze at.” It is analogous, not to any “dazzling meteor in the appearance of nature, or to any splendid spectacle produced by art, but to that glorious luminary which is not the less serviceable in enabling us to be sure of our path, because we cannot stedfastly behold it.”

A false Revelation is likely to contain many things which would gratify human curiosity, but would involve no practical duties, and this is one of those points in which, if the above remarks be correct, it would differ from a true Revelation.

The natural desire of knowledge which is implanted within us, would lead a skilful forger

^b HIND'S Rise of Christianity.—Vol 1, page 122.

to adapt his Revelation to this craving, and we might expect that such a one would be more than ordinarily explicit in his intelligence, he would foresee that objections on the score of unintelligibleness, would most likely be raised, and he would be on the alert to prevent the possibility of such occurring. He would see that man has in particular an eager longing after further information regarding the ways and works of God, and to this appetite he would immediately address himself; and, to prove that he had indeed been admitted into the councils of Heaven, he would describe those unknown regions, towards which human aspirations are always tending, as if he had been an eye-witness of them. Nor would the case be materially altered were the author of the spurious Revelation not an imposter but an enthusiast, for he too would, though from different cause, fall into the same track as the other. The feelings which the imposter sought to gratify in others, would forcibly exist in himself, and these, acting on a morbid imagination, would leave him to deceive himself with what the other had skilfully invented for

the purpose of deceiving others. In both these cases then, information regarding the regions of the unknown and invisible world superabounds, and what to a superficial observer would seem the most convincing evidence of genuineness, may, we see, be justly held as one of the most decisive marks of spuriousness.^c

That such a conclusion is no mere hypothesis, is proved by the most rapid glance at those superstitions, which, under the name of Revelation, have successively imposed upon mankind; in all these we find an almost childish minuteness with regard to the future state; a shadowy dwelling on those particular pleasures which the countrymen of the impostor would most eagerly covet, and a studied obtrusion of those

^c This is exactly the course of argument pursued by BISHOP WARBURTON in his "Divine Legation of Moses." His object in this singular work is to prove the Divine mission of the Hebrew lawgiver, not merely from the scanty intelligence which he gave regarding a future state, but from the circumstance that no information whatsoever was given by him concerning it,—a fact inexplicable when the code of uninspired lawgivers and their copious references to a future state are considered, except on the hypothesis that he was divinely inspired.

horrors from which their particular experience would prompt them to shrink. If these observations are correct, we may be prepared to expect that the conduct of a true Revelation, will, in these points, be found exactly opposite, and that the practical character to which we have already adverted, will be found its most distinguishable feature.

When the false Revelation would give notions of future bliss and woe, the true will tell us how to secure the one and avoid the other ; where the impostor would lift the curtain and in miniature proportions which all may scan, sketch the features of that dread Being, who, in His bright sanctuary sits behind it, the true Revelation will be busied in unfolding to us the varied duties on our side, that spring from our relation to Him, and chiefly intent, not on lowering Him, to our capacity, but on lifting us nearer to His nature ; it will only unfold to us so much of His character, as will suffice for a solid foundation whereon to build the code of laws to which it demands our adherence. In this process, however, statements not perfectly comprehensible by us, must occur.

For as all duty springs from relation between the party that owes it, and that to which it is owed, it follows, that the party which owes the duty, must know something, at least, of the nature and extent of the Revelation from which such duty flows. He requires not to know the entire history and nature of the Being to whom he owes this duty, but he must know so much of Him, as will render the fulfillment of the duty a reasonable service.

A child, in the performance of his duties towards his father, needs not to be informed of the character and rank of his parent, but he must know that he *is his parent*, and whatever notion he may form of this term, it must be one sufficiently definite, to convince him of his parent's right to receive his love and obedience. Even so is it, with the parent of the universe. Though he may not know the various properties of His nature, yet something must necessarily be revealed; but as this Being is infinite in His nature, perceptions, and attributes, it follows, that whatever is revealed regarding Him, even though bearing practically on man, must be tinged with an obscurity arising from this pecu-

liarity, that to us will wear even the appearance of contradiction. Nothing can be more easy in forging a Revelation than by an artful disposition of particulars to avoid the appearance of such obscurity; and the absence of this subject is therefore to be held as a mark of a true Revelation;^d especially if this obscurity and difficulty of comprehension be frankly owned by the document which purports to be such. Since it is inconceivable, not only that an impostor should admit such into his Revelation, but that if he has done so, that he should call attention to them. Moreover if, in addition to the infinity of the Divine nature, which must, to a certain extent, enter into the subject matter of a Revelation, we take into account the probable destiny of man, so far as consideration of his immaterial

^d The following excellent rule respecting this point, is given by COLERIDGE. "Reasoning from finite to finite, on a basis of truth, also, reasoning from infinite to infinite, on a basis of truth, will always lead to truth, as intelligible as the basis on which such truths respectively rest. While, reasoning from finite to infinite; or from infinite to finite, will lead to apparent absurdity, although the basis be true. And is not such apparent absurdity, another expression for truth unintelligible by a finite mind!"—*Aids to Reflection*, note p. 156.

part can enable us to discover it, and which we are entitled to infer must form, in connection with the development of his duties, an important part of a genuine Revelation, and if we consider the mysteriousness of that tenant of our bodily frames, the qualities and essence of which baffle our mightiest efforts to detect, we shall see abundance of additional proofs for the assertion that a genuine Revelation *must* contain certain things hard to be understood. How can those high themes, the purpose and scheme of the Creator in our formation, and the mode in which the designs of the good Spirit have apparently been baffled in our world, as connected with the manner in which we ought to co-operate with his plans, be revealed to us without involving not merely the intentions, but the very nature and inmost essence of one, of whose existence it is a necessary condition, that no created intelligence can fathom his nature. And yet such, it may confidently be expected, will be the topics about which a genuine Revelation must be conversant. The only alternative then is, either to admit the Revelation, clear, with regard to the nature of our duties, but

dark and mysterious, respecting Him, who is their object, or else to assert that no Revelation can be made by the Supreme Being to man. There is no middle course. If a Revelation is to be made, it *must*, in consequence of the topics of which it will treat, contain mysteries, and without the admixture of something mysterious, it would dwindle into a mere code of moral *Philosophy*, so utterly unstable in its foundation, so utterly devoid of a binding and obligatory character, as not to deserve the name of a religion.

In a word, mere information regarding the unknown world, is the characteristic of a spurious Revelation; a mere catalogue of duties, of a purely human philosophy; a genuine Revelation therefore embraces them both, and deduces the *one* from the other. But whilst we should feel justified in regarding, with suspicion, the claims of a Revelation, so copious and full in its information as to leave no question unanswered, inasmuch as the God of nature would not then be recognised in the God of Revelation, still, it must not be presumed, that a Revelation which leaves such themes not

fully explained, is, therefore, with reference to us, to be censured as meagre and imperfect in its communications. There is, in some cases, an advantage in a scanty Revelation, where a farther development might defeat its end. For practical purposes, all truth is relative, and that which is a true statement of doctrine to one capacity of intellect, may be virtually false to another, if it be such, as cannot but lead the person to whom it is made, to form false conclusions. But this would be unavoidable, if it involved matters above the capacity of his intellect. On the contrary, that which gives him, if not a perfectly correct idea of things as they are, yet the nearest to this that we can receive, may, with reference to him, be deemed true. An inadequate notion is better than none, and if the present measure of our intellect can be shown to preclude a fuller development, with reference to questions that involve the Divine nature, a slight consideration of what we are wont to do in the ordinary affairs of life, will lead us to expect that a Divine teacher will rather give us what we can at present bear, than preserve a total silence.

Where a full Revelation cannot be made, we may reasonably look for an imperfect one. But an imperfect Revelation forms a mystery. So far as it is clear, it may fitly be termed a Revelation; beyond that, mystery begins. Thus a teacher instructing his pupil in arithmetic, to use a former illustration, may be described as conveying truth mingled with mystery, and preferring rather to convey to his pupil inadequate notions, than not to convey any notions at all. He cannot inform of the reason or rationale of his rules, that requiring a knowledge of the higher branches of mathematics, but he would not, therefore, be justified in withholding from him the rules. The truths which he does convey to his pupil, are, for practical purposes, to him relatively true; but an infusion of theoretical reasoning regarding the principles on which they are formed, would not only be unintelligible to the pupil, but would most probably confuse his notions with regard to the rules themselves, so far as to destroy their practical utility. The eye is formed to give primarily intelligence of light and colour only, and the child is in his first perceptions, neces-

sarily mislead as to the form and magnitude of objects.^e But is it not better that this inconvenience should for a season exist, than that, to avoid passing through the transition state of imperfect perception, he should never come to have any perceptions at all? So too, this may be our rudimental and transition state, as to a knowledge of loftier things; *here* we may be as children gaining our first notions, and a little time may suffice, in a higher state of existence, to correct the errors into which we may *here* have necessarily fallen, in acquiring so much as we do know of these things.

^e See Berkeley's Theory of Vision.

■

The Christian Revelation does contain Mysteries.

HITHERTO we have treated merely of a Revelation in general, and have endeavoured to prove, that the existence of mysteries would form no solid argument against its truth, and, provided those who maintained its divine origin, brought forward the proper amount of external evidence in favour of its claims, the mere fact of its containing things hard to be understood, or even impossible to be fully comprehended, ought not to invalidate its pretensions.

But we have to stake in this controversy the credit of a system of unspeakable interest, and any discussion of this kind that leads not to reflect a strong and steady light on its claims and evidences, and to clear up the difficulties that seem to surround it must appear vague and nugatory. We purpose, therefore, to apply to this system the arguments which hitherto we have considered without special reference to any

in particular, and shall show that the Christian Revelation not only may, but, from the very nature of the subject of which it treats, *must* contain mysteries, and, consequently, *that the existence of these forms no solid argument against its truth.*

Those who hold that the mysterious doctrines of a Revelation form no solid argument against its truth, may in their treatment of Christianity, be divided into two classes, those, viz. who admit that there are mysteries in the documents which profess to reveal this system of religion, and thence deny its genuineness, and those who admit its genuineness, but in arriving at this conclusion, deny the existence of its mysteries.^f

With this latter class of opponents we are

^f The arguments of these two classes of adversaries, if expressed in a syllogistic form, would stand thus :—

Every Revelation that contains mysteries is *spurious*.

But the Christian Revelation contains mysteries.

Therefore the Christian Revelation is *spurious*.

Every Revelation that contains mysteries is *spurious*.

But the Christian Revelation is not *spurious*.

Therefore the Christian Revelation does not contain mysteries.

The former is the Infidel, the latter the Socinian, hypothesis;

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here less immediately concerned, than with the other ; yet inasmuch as the same fallacy vitiates both conclusions ; we deem it necessary to preface our examination of the mysterious doctrines of Christianity, by showing that this Revelation really does contain statements of facts that lie above and beyond the sphere of our comprehension.

In treating of some Christian doctrines as things hard to be understood, it may be proper to draw a line of distinction between two classes of Scripture difficulties ; those, namely, which are difficult of comprehension, *per se*, and those wherein the difficulty arises from the nature of the vehicle employed for conveying the Revelation. Our concern here, is solely with the former class. To the other may be referred the

the former is refuted by disproving the major premiss, this however would not be a sufficient answer to the other. It would not from thence follow that the Christian Revelation *does* contain *mysteries*, if the argument were directed simply to shew that there is no necessary inconsistency between the genuineness of a Revelation, and its containing mysteries, hence the necessity in order to meet both classes of opponents, to shew in the text that our Revelation *does really* contain mysteries.

obscurities which spring from an imperfect acquaintance with the languages of the Old and New Testaments, and the manners and customs of the parties introduced, while a third class may, perhaps, be formed, of those cases where the ways of God's providence seem to be at variance with our pre-conceived ideas of a moral fitness and propriety.^g

In proving that the Christian Revelation contains statements, of which we cannot comprehend the full import and bearing, the only mode is, to examine some of its leading doctrines, and shewing that those views, which are in fullest harmony with the written record, may be so characterised; and on the contrary, that those explanations which ingenious men have devised, and which involve little or no apparent contradiction, are at variance with one statement or other of the Revelation.

It is a principle in philosophy and sound reasoning, that no theory is to be considered correct, which is not co-extensive with the facts

^g With regard to these last, the Hulsean Lectures of the REV. C. BENSON, "On Scripture Difficulties," may be consulted with much advantage.

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or phenomena which it professes to explain.^h The theory, *e. g.* which derives all our ideas from sensation is faulty in this respect, because it leaves unexplained, a large class of our ideas ; those viz. of incorporeal or immaterial qualities, as cause and effect, Spirit, and the like, which it is evident no modification of ideas derived from sensible qualities, could ever evolve. The same may be detected in many other hypotheses.

Now in most of the leading doctrines of Christianity, we may, on examination, perceive more than one class of facts, and no theory or doctrine regarding them, can be deemed admissible, which does not comprehend all the phenomena brought under our view. With regard, for instance, to the person of Christ, there is one class of doctrines or facts, which describes him as God, and alongside of this, there is another class of statements, that describes him as man. Any theory, consequently, which only accounts for, and explains, the former character, is imperfect, and no less so, is that which includes, simply, an explanation of the other. The correct theory must account

^h See Airey's Tracts.

for both phenomena. If, however, we find that the two theories, which, on these grounds, we designate as faulty, are still perfectly intelligible, whilst that which, from being co-extensive with the facts, satisfies the necessary conditions of a true theory, is yet such as to appear contradictory, *i. e.* transcends the grasp of our understanding rightly to conceive, we do, on good grounds, assert, that this is, at least, one mysterious doctrine, contained in the Christian Revelation. And such theory we find actually to have been formed. On the subject of Christ's nature, then, are found in the Bible, two sets of statements, one of which affirms that he is God,ⁱ and the other that he is man.^j A correct

ⁱ Among numerous other proofs, the following passages may be quoted as direct testimonies. JOHN i. 1—5. ACTS xx. 28. ROM. ix. 5. 1 TIM. iii. 16. 1 JOHN v. 20.

With regard to the passages from Acts and Romans, and especially that much contested point, the *genuineness* of the common text in the former, the reader is referred to the admirable work of BISHOP MIDDLETON on the Greek article; and the genuineness of the passage from Timothy, is, in our opinion, indisputably proved in the able dissertation by BERRIMAN, on that Text. (8vo. London 1741.)

^j See (*inter alia*) JOHN i. 14. JOHN ii. 12. ACTS ii. 30 PHILIP ii. 7.

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theory *must* therefore include both of these classes of statements. Yet we find that explanations have been advanced at different times regarding Christ's nature, some of which, as those of Arius and Socinus, denied his Godhead, in the true and proper sense of that term, the latter regarding him merely as a man. Now such a theory presents no difficulties to the understanding, but *that* which we term the Catholic doctrine or theory does, by asserting that in Jesus Christ, the divine and human natures were united;^k an union of which we cannot comprehend all the bearings. Nay, where we cannot progress beyond a simple enunciation of the fact, but which, however, must enter into the only admissible theory on the subject.

^k "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made: Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from Heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man."—*Nicene Creed*. Conformable to this statement is the language of our Church.—
ART. ii.

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Again we find it stated in the Christian Revelation, that the persons of the God-head are three,¹ and it is also asserted that there is but one God.^m Any theory or doctrine, therefore, which has respect merely to one of these two *facts* (for so we may still be permitted to call them) is faulty on the score of deficiency. And yet such theories have been framed. One, for instance, recognises merely the Unity of the Divine nature, and forgets its Trinity; whilst another dwells exclusively on the Trinity, and leaves out of view the Unity. The former maintains that there is but one God, and that this Divine Being has seen it good to manifest himself to man, under three different characters. This is the Sabellian hypothesis. The other holds that there are three divine persons, and that these are not one God, but form one God-head. A third hypothesis maintains that there are three persons, and that these three are one God. Of these various theories, the first and

¹ See ISA. lxiii. 7—10. MATT. xxviii. 19. JOHN xiv. 16, 17. 1 COR. xii. 4—6.

^m See DEUT. vi. 4. MARK xii. 32.; x. 18. 1 COR. viii. 6. 1 THESS. i. 9. 1 TIM. i. 17; vi. 15.

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second explain each only one class of facts, the third is co-extensive with all the facts, asserting "one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity."ⁿ Yet the first two are perfectly intelligible, the third contains difficulties which no human understanding is able to solve. But the third has ever been maintained to be the true doctrine of the Bible, whilst the others have uniformly been denounced as fraught with error. These two doctrines then, that which regards the nature and person, and that which has respect to the God-head, may safely be pronounced to come within the range of mysterious doctrines. We need not multiply proofs that there are in Scripture, things that lie beyond our unaided reason, and one more will suffice. There are in the Bible, two classes of statements, with regard to the mode of obtaining God's favour, and acquiring fitness for the Celestial Kingdom, "that by grace salvation is obtained, through faith, not of works;^o and that faith without works is dead, being alone."^p Each of these statements has been adopted on the basis of a

ⁿ Athanasian Creed.

^o EPH. ii. 8, 9.

^p JAMES ii. 17.

separate hypothesis ; that of the Antinomian, which recognises faith alone, rejecting the necessity of good works ; and that of the Legalist which admits the necessity of the latter. Each of these systems is quite comprehensible, and presents no difficulties to the understanding. But the Catholic Church has ever held a third view, that which embraces both the facts of Revelation on this head, and yet this third view contains difficulties with regard to the mutual bearings of these two agencies, which we cannot adequately explain.

But if the Socinian denies the existence of these mysteries in the Christian Revelation, let him be assured he has only paved the way for the admission of statements, still more incomprehensible. The language, *e. g.* in which the Evangelists narrate the actions of Christ, and speak of his character, is, on the hypothesis that he is a mere man, unaccountable. Still more so is the favourite notion of the Socinian, that the “word” or λόγος of the Divine Being, is merely a quality or attribute of his nature, and that this quality or character became man, and was clothed in a garment of flesh ; to say so, is,

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in fact, to confound the distinction between substance and quality, by asserting that the latter underwent a transmutation into the former. Nor, in fine, is the notion less unreasonable, that a mere man should be exalted into an object of worship, which results from the scheme of those who deny the Divine nature of Christ; to admit this, we must introduce the inculcation of idolatry into the Christian system, and make the Revelation contradict itself, where it denounces this as sin, and that too in a manner, that lying (as this question does) entirely within the scope of our reason, tends to nullify the whole Revelation.^a

^a For further remarks on this subject the reader is referred to BISHOP STILLINGFLEET's excellent Discourse "on Scripture Mysteries."—*Enchiridion Theologicum*, Vol. i.; to which, for some of the above remarks, I confess my obligations. In arguing with the Socinian, it will be obvious that we take for granted, as we are allowed to do, the genuineness of the Revelation.

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“THERE is nothing that the Holy Ghost doth so much labour, in all the Scripture, to beat into men’s heads, as repentance, amendment of life, and speedy returning unto the Lord God of hosts.”^r If this be a true statement of the purport of the Christian Revelation, we need not be surprised at its silence on topics, the full explanation of which, would in no way further this end. We have already shewn in the former section, that there is no necessary incompatibility between the existence of mysteries in a Revelation, and its truth, provided it can be shewn that the object for which the Revelation takes place, lies in another direction ; and we suggested as the most probable end, for which a Revelation would be granted, or rather the only cause for which we could imagine one to be given, a *practical* bearing on human life and

^r Homily of Repentance.

destiny. To prove, therefore, the possibility that the Christian Revelation *may* contain mysteries, without endangering its reputation of genuineness, we have only to enquire whether it does fall within the exculpatory limit which we then pointed out; in other words it now behoves us to enquire what is the purport of this Revelation, and whether its object be practical or theoretical.

If simply theoretical, then may we (at least in the outset) expect a full explanation of all the topics on which it professes to treat; if practical, it must be conceded, if our former reason is correct, that, at least, it *may* contain mysteries.

Under this head, we lay down two propositions.

First,—That the object of the Christian Revelation is *practical*.

Second,—That none of the mysteries contained in it, are of such a nature as to defeat the attainment of its object.

First,—The great end of the Christian Revelation is, after informing man of his alienation from his maker, and the circumstances which led to his apostacy, to aid in restoring him to that

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place in God's favor, and to fit him for the enjoyment of that happiness for which he was originally designed.

Every one who reads its pages dispassionately, must see that such is its aim ; that it addresses itself to the great task of correcting the evil nature, which it affirms to be in man, of renewing his nature after a purer model, and of re-establishing those principles of rectitude, and holiness, and purity, which a great moral revolution had well nigh banished from the earth. To this grand object all its efforts are aimed ; to this single point its exhortations, its precepts, its promises, its threatenings, its prophecies are directed. The Christian Scriptures are not books filled with speculations, and curious researches. To that question of surpassing interest to every rational mind, "what shall I do to be saved?" they give but one simple and uniform answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." They declare that the object of the gospel is to set men free from the tyranny of their sins. And the same thing is proved by the example of the first teachers of Christianity. For what object could have

actuated men, who renounced every thing, and who endured every species of toil and misery, and suffering, except to persuade their fellow creatures to do “the things that belong to their peace?” Besides, whether they speak or write, they spend not their time in controversies and disputes, the ordinary fruits of human vanity; every thing with them is practical; every thing in their discourses and their writings bears a *close* reference to human actions and feelings. Spurning at “the enticing words of man’s wisdom,” their sole aim is edification, “my little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” Lastly the practical character of Christianity, may be still further seen by adverting to that very peculiar feature of it, the numerous exhortations which it contains of a cautionary and preventive character. This we conceive to be a distinguishing mark of the Christian Religion, when contrasted with other systems of religion. He who governs not his inward thoughts and imaginations, leaves his soul a prey to those corrupting desires, which keep it in a disposition to violate the requisitions of God’s law, and in a readiness to

proceed to acts of impurity, or violence, whenever circumstances may bring them before him.

In truth, nothing seems more alien from the mind of these early teachers of Christianity, than the notion, that they were delivering merely speculative truths. If they tell us of God, it is to tell us to be like him. If they unfold to us the joys of heaven, it is that we may thirst after them. If they tell us of a future scene of misery, it is that we may be incited to shun it. Yet how sparing are they in their descriptions of those separate states! Mahomet gives us in his Koran, the most minute and circumstantial details respecting the Paradise which he promises to his Believers. Every voluptuous delight that can tempt the passion of the Oriental, he sets before them.

But the Christian is simply informed that for him, if a lover of God, "eye hath not seen, nor imagination conceived the joys that await him." But, as to the mode of gaining those high rewards, every part of the Christian Revelation is clear and explicit. The language of its author is this,—“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of

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heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”^t And this is the uniform tenour of Revelation; for “*all* Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”^u

Those who examine the Christian Revelation for the purpose of convincing themselves that its great object is practical, will, however, do well

^t MATT. vii. 21.

^u 2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

Compare, among numerous others, the following passages, taken from widely separate parts of the Revelation, and written in widely different periods of the Church.

“The secret *things* belong unto the Lord our God: but those *things which* are revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law.”

DEUT. xxix. 29.

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” MICAH vi. 8.

“Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

LUKE vi. 46.

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

1 COR. x. 11.

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to bear in mind the following cautions. First, that, in such examination, we advert to the circumstance that a large portion of the scriptures conduceth to practical results, not immediately, but mediately, not directly, but indirectly. Of such a nature are many of the historical parts, and those which confirm fulfilled prophecy. But, even in such cases, it highly behooves us to know the dealings of God with reference to our race; and if we admit, as we are bound to do, that these things are recorded for our example, a directly practical result is immediately obtained. If merely secular history has been rightly termed philosophy teaching by example, surely then, the scripture history may well be termed, *the tuition of a Divine philosophy*. And whilst it teaches us God's love for them that love him, and his constant and unceasing Providence over all his creatures, equally efficacious is fulfilled prophecy in unfolding to us other perfections of the Divine nature, his omniscience, and his wisdom; and in conciliating still farther our regard and admiration.

Secondly, we ought to remember that from those parts of the Revelation most difficult to be com-

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prehended, there may still be gathered practical lessons; the Doctrine of the Trinity, for example, is confessedly held to be such; but even this, dark and mysterious as it is, is calculated to fill our minds, if rightly contemplated, with sentiments of reverence, of awe, and of humility. Lastly, in considering the practical character of the Christian Revelation, we must advert to the fact, that practical, is a word of relative signification, and what is practical to one age of the Church may not be so to another. Many of the Apostolic epistles, for instance, were, it may safely be granted, ever immediately practical in their results, with reference to those to whom they were addressed. And if this can be made out, as doubtless it can, even though we should fail of discovering, in every part of them, an immediate bearing on ourselves, and our particular circumstances, yet would not their practical character be thereby invalidated. And in like manner it is easy to conceive that, in many respects, they may bear to us, living at this remote epoch from their first publication, a practical value which *then* they could not have, by assuring us of the similarity of the Catholic doctrines in all ages, and that

what is now taught as such, is the same with that which was held at the beginning. So also in the case of Prophecy. The practical value of *unfulfilled* Prophecy is of one kind—of *fulfilled* of another. The value of the former is of a direct nature—of the latter of an indirect nature. The former is useful in telling beforehand of coming events—and in preparing men for their arrival; the latter affords evidence on the completion of the Prophecy, of the Divine mission of him who uttered it; an evidence so satisfactory that nothing can justly be esteemed superior. Whether, then, we look to the immediate or mediate bearing which the Christian Revelation has on man; whether we look to the directly practical nature of its precepts, and its Revelations of the future, or to the inestimable and important lessons to be derived from a consideration of its historical and prophetical parts, we are justly warranted in admitting the truth of its own assertion, that “all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

The more steadily we keep in view this great truth, that the object of the Christian Revela-

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tion is practical, the less liable shall we be to fall into error from a consideration of its mysteries. One of the most common fallacies into which, in all our researches, we are apt to run, is our proneness to mistake and overstep the true boundaries of the human faculties. However distrustful men may be, in some respects, of the power of unaided reason, they come to a study of Revelation with an expectation for which they can have no previous warrant, that *thus* they receive a full and distinct knowledge of all the points of which the Revelation may treat. The original source of this error is doubtless to be sought for in that pride which is natural to the human heart, which makes man disdain to acquiesce in the belief of what he does not fully understand; and another source may be traced in his thirst after knowledge, which, however excellent and praiseworthy it may be, when reserved within just limits, is very liable to be carried to excess. Against the error springing from these two sources—the error of expecting a full knowledge of everything which God has revealed to us in his word, we know of no better preservative than frequent

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and deep meditation on the real object for which the Christian Revelation was granted, viz. that we may be instructed in what is needful to be known, in order to our serving God, and living conformably with His commandments. Every thing that lies beyond this, is withheld ; up to this point, nothing needful has been kept back.

Our second proposition was, that none of the mysteries contained in the Christian Revelation are of such a nature as to defeat the attainment of its professed object.

Although our attention be now mainly confined to prove that the existence of mysteries in the Christian Revelation forms no argument against its truth, yet it is not the mere existence of mysteries in it which is always attacked by the Infidel. In many cases, the ground between the Christian advocate and his opponent has been narrowed, and limited, rather to the consideration of particular mysterious doctrines, than to the general question of the admissibility of mysteries at all. And in such discussions, we find that the most frequent argument urged against the mysteries of the Christian Revelation is, "that they unfit it for purposes of a prac-

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tical nature." If the dispute was always confined to the general question, are mysteries admissible in a Revelation, the Infidel would deem it unnecessary, if he thought he had maintained his own proposition, to spend his forces in particular attacks on individual mysteries; but since, however, he has frequently made such attacks, it becomes the more necessary to advance the proofs whereby we can substantiate our proposition.

The question is "has Christianity succeeded, in its object, or has it failed?" If it has succeeded, then have none of its mysterious doctrines, blighted its energies or defeated its purposes. But Christianity has not failed. Its triumphs have been by the bedsides of the dying, and by the last hours of the conscience-stricken sinner; its victories have been proclaimed wherever the footsteps of the missionary have penetrated, and myriads now live under its mild and equal laws, who, but for it, would have been the votaries of a blood-stained Heathenism. Twelve humble men went forth from Galilee, on a crusade against the powers and the wealth, the pomps and the vanities, of the world; and

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the powers of the world set themselves in array against them. But surely the Lord fought for them ; surely an unseen arm protected them. For a system that proclaimed open war with many of the dearest passions of the natural heart, has succeeded in treading on the neck of superstitions that ministered to every lust, and all resistance that assailed it served but to fan its flames, and give new energy to its successes. What it proposed, it has achieved. And that, too, in such a manner as to warrant us in tossing back, with withering scorn, the reproach of credulity, to the philosopher who thinks that all this may be sufficiently accounted for on human principles. Yes ! Christianity is practical in its object—and nobly has it succeeded in realizing its promised results.

Since then the object for which the Christian Revelation was granted, can be proved to be practical, it must be conceded, that it *may* contain mysteries ; that they are compatable, *at least*, with the result which the author of the Revelation contemplated.

But we shall now go a *step farther*, and proceed to prove that

The Christian Revelation must contain Mysteries.

WHAT, in the former section, we stated as a probable anticipation, with regard to a true Revelation in general, has, we find, been actually realized in that whose claims we now advocate—that whilst a practical bearing on man and his destinies would be its leading characteristics, this would be inseparably connected with Revelations scanty indeed, yet sufficient for their purpose, of the Divine nature. Thus we saw the greatest probability, that so much, at least, of the Divine nature would be unfolded, as would suffice whereon to base its requisitions from man. And we shewed finally, that if such a course took place, statements and doctrines would necessarily be introduced beyond the capacity of the human mind adequately to comprehend.

On inspecting the Christian Revelation we find that all this has taken place. We find

statements and doctrines regarding, not merely higher orders of intelligence, but respecting that Being of whose existence, (to borrow our former remark,) it is a necessary condition that no created intelligence can fathom his nature. We find communications from this glorious Being—we find statements not only respecting his attributes and qualities—but touching, directly, on the very nature of his existence. We have statements respecting the Godhead—we are told of other persons belonging to it of whose existence, unaided reason—had never previously formed even a conjecture.^v The

^v We pass by here, as unworthy of notice, all that “*decan-tata fabula*” about Platonism and other Heathen Trinities as adumbrations of the Christian doctrine, and agree with COLERIDGE that *Plotinist* would be their more fitting appellation, being rather *reflections* from Christianity, than *precursors* of it.

“From the confounding of *Plotinism* with *Platonism*, the Latitudinarian Divines fell into the mistake of finding in the Greek philosophy many anticipations of the Christian faith, which in fact were but its echoes. The inference is as perilous as inevitable, namely, that even the mysteries of Christianity needed no Revelation, having been previously discovered and set forth by unaided reason.”—*Coleridge Literary Remains*, Vol. iii, p. 416.

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most astonishing of all mysteries would be, that, such themes could be fully handled in such a way as to be comprehensible by the human understanding. We have already shown in the first section, that, upon a careful consideration of the topics which a Revelation may justly be expected to introduce, the conclusion is—that mysteries are inevitable, and that, therefore, their existence is not to be urged as an argument against its truth. We have now seen that the Christian Revelation does actually contain such topics, and, inasmuch as the admission, that “None can by searching find out God, none can find out the Almighty to perfection,”^w will be made by every sound mind, we are also entitled to infer, that the existence of mysteries in the Christian Revelation forms no solid argument against *its* truth.

We deem ourselves, however, justified in proceeding beyond this point; and we ask the candid inquirer—if he can fully realize to himself the notion of a Revelation from Infinite Intelligence, which would not contain “things

^w JOB xi. 7, 8.

hard to be understood ?” Were a Revelation to be promulgated without such difficulties, we hesitate not to affirm that it would be deficient in many of the most satisfactory tokens of a Divine origin. Nor would the unbeliever be slow in discovering so open a ground of attack. The battery which he now opens on the Christian Revelation would shift its position, and his artillery would be aimed against this much more vulnerable point. Let the Book be divested of those difficulties which result from the intercourse of a superior nature with ours, and you rob it of one of the most convincing proofs that such is actually its origin.^x

“That God should speak with all the simplicity of a man, and never once introduce an allusion to matters unknown, or too high for man’s ordinary preceptions, would have been deemed, and I think, justly deemed, as inconceivable, as that a philosopher should speak with the homeliness of a rustic, and never once refer to

^x “That which so far surpasses all understanding cannot be a dream of the human mind ; that which excites us to so much good cannot be the work of an impostor.”—*Purke’s sur la Philosophie de l’incrédulité.*

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principles of science, which are unknown or incomprehensible to the labourer.”^y

A Revelation which should exhibit no marks of that infinite distance which must ever lie between the Creator and the creature, would, therefore, carry in its forehead—the mark of falsity; it is to make God comprehensible by man, to make the *infinite* be grasped by the *finite*. As well might we circumscribe eternity within the boundaries of time, or inclose the boundless fields of space, within the narrow limits of this world’s continent. If the Bible were not mysterious, it could not discourse to us of God, who must for ever remain a fathomless mystery, not merely to man, but, to the highest orders of created intelligence. Those, therefore, who demand a Revelation without mysteries may fairly be charged with asking for an absurdity. Infinity is the theatre on which the Most High performs his designs, and eternity is to be occupied in their completion; and Himself “although to know be life, and joy to make mention of his name; yet our soundest

^y BENSON’S Hulsean Lectures, p. 56.

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knowledge is, to know that we know him not as indeed he is, neither can know him; and our safest eloquence concerning him, is our silence, when we confess, without confession, that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity and reach.”^z

If in fine Revelation were to limit itself by the powers of the human intellect, it would exclude those topics on which, from the weakness of our understanding, Revelation is required. To suit the expectations of the Infidel, therefore, either that scanty amount of information must alone be given which would exclude those high topics, or the human faculties must be strengthened and enlarged, and man must be lifted up into a higher state in the scale of Being. Such is the unanswerable conclusion to which the argument of the Infidel directly conducts him. We again say, therefore, that there would have been abundant fairness in the objection, which would have been urged against

HOOKEE Eccl. Pol. B. 1, s. 2.

See SUMMER’S sermons on the Festivals.—Ser. xxi.—*5th Edition*. Were some things concerning God which we can, and some which we cannot understand are beautifully set forth.

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Christianity had it contained nothing "hard to be understood." Men might then, with less risk of speedy refutation, have advanced the position that a Revelation which levelled the *infinite* to the capacity of the *finite*, must have been guilty of misrepresentation. And even unassisted Reason can, in her clear moments, see that none "can by searching find out God;" and if she found that a document, purporting to contain a Revelation from this Being, remained yet in all respects, easy and intelligible, and exhibited a God in no-way lifted above the full survey of human observation, doubtless she would decide, and justice would ratify her decision, *that the absence of mysteries DID form a solid argument against its truth and genuineness.*

The Infidel's Creed contains Mysteries.

WERE it proved with regard to those who maintain the legitimate existence of mysteries, or incomprehensible statements in a Revelation, that they were singular in their belief, although this circumstance would not of itself convict them of error, since their acquiescence in mysteries would deserve to be weighed and considered on independant evidence; yet the great bulk of mankind is so constituted, that, from this very circumstance, they would pronounce a verdict against them. It is prudent, therefore, to inquire—whether the opponents of our Revelation on this ground, do not themselves act in the very manner they condemn—nay whether statements which we do not perfectly comprehend, be not a part of that universal and every day belief of mankind, without which the common concerns of *human* life could not be carried on.

In doing so we shall first notice those opinious

of our opponents, which are peculiar to their own systems, considering, in the first place, the tenets of the Atheist, and, secondly, those of the Deist. By those who deny the existence of a Creator and Governor of the Universe, two different opinions have been brought forward, with regard to its origin. The first is that of Epicurus, as expounded by Lucretius, who held that this universe was formed, not by the power of God, but by the fortuitous or chance concourse of atoms; and the other is that of Aristotle and the Peripatetics, and embraced by most of the modern Free-thinkers, "that this mundane system has existed from all eternity, and never has been made at all, either by the Deity or without him." This opinion exists under two forms. First, that the elementary matter, of which the universe is compounded, is eternal, as to its origin; or secondly, that from eternity it has existed, as it now does, in a compound state. Respecting these opinions, our proposition is, that they are beset with difficulties of such a nature, as fairly to entitle them to a place among incomprehensible statements.

As a fortuitous concourse, either of atoms, or of other substances, has been witnessed neither by the Atheist nor any one else, we cannot have the remotest idea of the manner in which it could have been brought about. By a law of our minds, so universal that philosophers have resolved it into an ultimate fact, and considered it the effect of intention, we are led to classify all phenomena which we witness under the two-fold relation of cause and effect. Of every phenomenon that we witness, we seek to investigate the cause, so universally do we take for granted that a cause does exist, though we fail to discover it, that, to suppose an action without an agent, an effect without a cause, would run counter, not only to our *experience*, which is so uniform in this matter that some^a would resolve into *it* our notion of cause and effect, but, to what may justly be termed the most simple, and ultimate laws of our mental constitution. We believe in the testimony of our senses, of our memory, of our consciousness, and no contrary assertion can persuade us that such testimony is erroneous. We cannot explain

^a Such as DAVID HUME, DR. THOMAS BROWN, &c.

why we believe such testimony. Such is our constitution, and this is all we can say in the matter. There are ultimate facts, and we cannot go beyond them. We *know* that we are so constituted. Equally strong and unassailable is the conviction which we have of the necessary connection between *cause and effect*, and however Hume and his followers may have attempted to introduce confusion into such belief, we can no more acquiesce in their theories, than with BERKELEY we can doubt the evidence of our senses, and disbelieve the existence of a material world. And yet this absurdity is involved in one of the forms which Atheism assumes; *this* which we have just seen it is impossible to believe, viz. that effects can be fortuitous, that is by chance, that is without any cause, has been gravely maintained by those who object to the incomprehensible doctrines of the Christian Revelation. They refuse their assent to doctrines on subjects that lie far beyond the reach of the human intellect, and they demand our assent to dogmas, that are as contradictory of the first principles of our understanding, as to disbelieve the evidence of

sense, of memory, and of consciousness. They reject our creed, and they present for our assent one which might fitly assume this form—*Credo quia est impossibile.*

We have already remarked that another form of the Atheistical hypothesis corresponded to the doctrines of the Ancient Peripatetics, either that this universe has, in its present form, existed from all eternity, or that the elementary matter of which it is compounded has so existed.

Now with regard to the former hypothesis, for we cannot call it a theory,^b we would

^b Having used these terms more than once, let it be allowed here to settle their signification.

By an hypothesis is meant a supposition, invented to account for an observed fact; it is a fancied cause. We know, for instance, that the nervous system is connected with sensation, but we cannot tell in what manner impressions are conveyed along them. To explain this, HARTLEY invented the hypothesis of "Vibration." So also we know that there is a connection between Soul and Body, but we cannot explain how they mutually act on each other. To explain this, LEITPELY invented the hypothesis of a "Pre-established harmony."

A theory, on the contrary, is generally founded on facts, such as that of Gravitation, where the observed fact forms the ground work, and is synonymous with the theological term "doctrine," the facts here being the declaration of Scripture.

remark, that an eternal compound is a contradiction, for if a compound, then there must have been a compounder and a time of composition, and if so, then its existence must have had a beginning. In fact, this notion is a slovenly attempt to get over difficulties by evading them, and under a specious pretence to cloak the veriest incongruity. Let us, then, consider the other hypothesis, namely, that the elementary matter of the universe has existed from all eternity. If so, the question immediately occurs, who, or what, if no Deity be supposed to exist, could have reduced that matter to its present form? What revolution of things impressed on this matter its multifarious shapes, and stamped it everywhere with those marks of design which strike even the most cursory observer? Grant the existence of a Divine Being, and the whole becomes intelligible, but, without this admission, we feel justified in calling this doctrine the most egregious of all mysteries, unless the hypothesis of the fortuitous concourse of atoms seems rather entitled to take the first place.

Nor are their philosophers less liable to animadversion under this head, for their doctrines

regarding the origin of man. Some have asserted, that the first man was produced by mere accident. Others have denied that he has had any beginning, but that his race has been continued in the same manner as we now see it, by Succession and Propagation.

On neither of these opinions need we dwell ; for the error which we have already exposed, that of supposing an effect without an adequate cause, pervades them all. In fact, if we attempt to philosophize on the origin of this universe, without taking into account the existence of God, we are immediately beset with difficulties, or rather impossibilities, that meet our view at every turn. Those, therefore, who profess such views, would do well not to object to the mysteries of the Christian Revelation, for the extreme of credulity has no right to reject aught that may be offered to its belief. It has already shewn its capacity for believing, by believing that the universe could have been made, and none to make it ; and we who reject all this, and cling merely to the simple doctrines of the Christian Revelation, beaming with light, though here and there tinged with obscurity, which a

gracious God, we believe will yet fulfil, ought by them to be termed the *unbeliever*. They the believers, or more properly the ultra-believers.

Secondly.—But the system of the Deist, it may be urged is not exposed to these objections. This, to a certain extent, we admit; and in exhibiting what we may at present term the *mysteries* which enter into the creed of the Deist, we must be careful to distinguish between those *truths* which he does hold, wherein yet many inexplicable things present themselves, and those inexplicable difficulties into which he runs, solely in consequence of what he does not believe—in consequence of the peculiarities of his own system. The Deist professes to believe in the existence of a God; he believes, at least some do, that the practice of virtue is the law which we live under, and he thinks that a future scene may be a probable termination of this present state, wherein the tears of suffering, virtue will be wiped away, and due punishment inflicted on those who have lived traitors to her laws. We have here taken the most favourable view of the system. Many who have denied the truths of the Christian Revelation, have also

sought to release themselves from the fancied severity of its statutes, and the virtue, therefore, of their Philosophers undergoes accordingly no little modification, according to the direction and vehemence of their own passions. For even Epicurus did not utterly deny the existence of the Gods. He only thought them far removed from the ways and works of mortals, and under this impression, many of his followers gave a loose to every evil appetite, and brought contempt on the moral character of a Philosopher, who has perhaps, in this respect, been misrepresented. Just so has it fared with many of the Infidel Philosophers of modern times, and the morality of Lords Herbert and Shaftesbury is very different from that of Rousseau and Voltaire. But however different, in many respects, the several schools of Infidel Philosophers, both in this and neighbouring countries, may have been, enough has been advanced by all of them, to warrant us abundantly in our assertion, that their systems are replete with difficulties, and that too of an insurmountable nature. Of the opinions which the Deist holds in common with the Christian, regarding the existence and cha-

racter of God, we shall speak hereafter ; at present it is our object to point out the difficulties that defy solution, which spring from *their* system, in so far, only, as it is distinguished from the Christian Revelation. And here, since the Being of a God is on both sides granted, the Infidel system fails to inform us how, under the administration of an infinitely good Being, which they grant him to be, moral evil has intruded into our world—why we meet with misery and wretchedness in a place over which they believe a Being of unerring justice presides ; why—since we utterly deny that they can prove the existence of a future state,^c their statements on that head being merely a borrowed reflection from Christianity, and, in truth, acknowledged by every one of themselves ; why man, being a creature of

^c Much discussion has taken place since the publication of Warburton's great work on the question, "Whether, and how far, *unaided reason* is competent to prove the existence, and form notions, of a future state." An attentive examination of the remains of Heathen antiquity, is, we think, sufficient to convince us, that doubtful surmises were the utmost of what the ancient Philosophers arrived at, and that the assertion that "Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light, in the gospel," may be adopted in all the fulness of its meaning.

such boundless and high aspirations, should be placed by this infinitely good and wise Being, on this insignificant ball of earth, merely to vegetate for a little season, and then cease to exist; and, lastly, he cannot tell, since his notions of the future state are, on his own system, not susceptible of demonstration, why he should either acknowledge *one* sole Maker, or recognise in that Being, the moral perfections which he professes to ascribe to him.

To all these questions, the Deist can return no satisfactory answer. But till he can do so, we are bound to insist that his objections to the mysteries of the Christian Revelation do vanish. He has no right to impugn the genuineness of that Revelation, because it involves questions to which no satisfactory reply can, at present,

The more confident assertions of the modern Infidels, in favour of a future state, may fairly be derived from the influence, (however disowned by them,) of Christianity, and in some of their arguments may be detected that fallacy which consists of reasoning in a vicious circle. They prove God's moral goodness and justice from the existence of a future state of rewards and punishments, and then prove the existence of such a state from God's infinite justice and goodness. See further remarks Appendix A.

be afforded, seeing that without positive information, and unsupported by positive evidence, he professes his belief in a system liable to all the objections which we have just enumerated; a system beset, in a word, with mysteries on the one hand, and with no direct proofs in favour of it, on the other.

Here, then, we may again apply the charge of credulity to him, who is more generally called the Unbeliever,—for he believes without evidence, and in the face of difficulties. The Christian, though difficulties do exist in his faith on certain points, yet believes on direct and *well grounded* evidence. Let not then the Infidel any longer arrogate to himself that superiority of intellect, which, he fancies, is derived from a hardness to believe. Whilst extreme proneness to believe, without due evidence, is to be esteemed a weakness, equally so is extreme Scepticism, to believe when there is evidence. And which of these is the besetting sin of the Infidel, will, by different minds, be differently estimated. To *us* it appears that both may, in different senses, be rightly charged against him, and that he who triumphs over the Christian world, for what he esteems

the easiness of their faith, ought speedily to be told, that the man who, in the face of insurmountable difficulties, believes a system supported by no proper evidence, may justly be branded with the mark of *weakness and credulity*. Let him remove it if he can.

**The common and every-day Belief of
Mankind contains Mysteries.**

It may perhaps be enquired why we have not, in the foregoing remarks, made a more frequent reference to the "Analogy" of BISHOP BUTLER, that work which so well vindicates to man the ways of God in the ways of redemption, by a comparison of these, with his ways and works in the kingdom of nature; but we thought it a worthier tribute to the great Philosopher, to endeavour to follow his example, and to imitate, as far as we could, his manner of enquiry, than merely to re-produce his immortal work under another form. "The Analogy" of this great Divine is, indeed, an adamantine pillar, worthy of the faith it is intended to support, as that faith is worthy of it.

It is the sound remark of an Apocryphal writer, that "Hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us; but the things

that are in Heaven, who hath searched out.”^d It is, in truth, one of the most common fallacies into which men fall, to fancy that whatever is a common subject of their thoughts and discourse, they consider as comprehensible by their faculties and clearly intelligible.

The only antidote to this fallacy lies in a deep and habitual reflection on the numberless mysteries that daily surround us, and the indistinct and imperfect notions which we possess of many phenomena, the existence of which we cannot

^d ‘*Omnia exeunt in mysterium,*’ says a Schoolman, *i. e.* there is *nothing*, the absolute ground of which, is not a mystery. The contrary were, indeed, a contradiction in terms; for how can that which is to explain all things, be susceptible of an explanation? It would be to suppose the same thing *first* and *second*, AT THE SAME TIME. *Aids to Reflection.*

“We do not at all know what the substance of any thing is.”—*Sir I. Newton.*

I may confidently say, that the intellectual and sensible world, are, in this particular, alike, that that part which we see of either of them, holds no proportion with what we see not, and whatsoever we can reach with our eyes, or our thoughts, of each of them, is but a point, almost nothing, in comparison of the rest; he that knows any thing, knows this in the first place, that he need not seek long for instances of his ignorance.

See also SMITH’S ‘Cure of Deism.’

doubt, although they are continually passing before our eyes.^e

Of many of our most familiar terms, we have but a very indistinct conception, and a few steps conduct us into an abyss of darkness, which no human understanding can fathom. In fact, the further we enquire into a variety of matters, the greater obscurity we find to pervade; and the remark of SIMONIDES to HIERO, is the confession of every candid and enquiring mind, that of certain things, such as the nature of God, the longer he meditates, the longer it seems requisite to meditate. We all profess to have certain notions of the Supreme Being, with reference to what we term his attributes, and the aggregate of human knowledge on this head, we group into a systematic form, and give it a place among the sciences, calling it Natural Theology. Yet how full of mysteries is this branch of knowledge. Of the difficulties that beset our cogi-

^e We believe men will live in a future state. This is a mystery contained in the Christian Revelation.

We believe seeds will die, and yet live again. This is a mystery in nature. The fact proves the truth, and by Analogy, the above mystery is solved.

tations on the Divine nature, we have already touched, and the less will it be necessary here to bring forward on this subject. Yet a very little reflection may convince us, that this scene, so worthily termed by BACON, “the Sabbath and Haven of all man’s contemplations,” is full of things hard to be understood, and that God is not to be viewed, in so far as mysteries are concerned, with a more unclouded aspect here, than He has vouchsafed to wear in Revelation.

The attributes of God, such as Self-existence, Eternity, Omnipresence, and the like, are no less mysterious, and above our comprehension, than the Doctrine of the Trinity. We find as great difficulty in conceiving the manner of these attributes, or in forming a notion how the Divine Being exists without cause or beginning, as to form a conception of Unity in Three Persons ; or of Trinity in One God.

By the self-existence of God we mean that He exists of himself, by the necessity of his nature, without external or internal cause of existence. We are certain that this is an attribute or property of the Divine Nature ; because, as He is the *first* cause of all things, it is impossible that any thing

should be prior to Him, or that there should be any cause from which He proceeds. And yet this is, to us, a great mystery. "The knowledge of it is too wonderful for us ; it is past finding out ; we cannot attain unto it." It is not for us to conceive how any Being can exist, without any possible cause of existence.

Nor less mysterious is the eternity of God. There are difficulties in it, which we cannot solve. When we attempt to explain, or even to conceive, an eternal past duration, we are immediately lost and bewildered ; and the longer we reflect upon the subject, the more amazing it grows. Whether we attempt to conceive of God's eternity, under the notion of an eternal *Now*, an everlasting instant, co-existent with all the periods of time, yet itself unaffected by their revolutions, or think of it under the form of a successive duration, we are equally beset with insuperable difficulties. We cannot realize to ourselves the notion of a Being who can appropriate to himself the expression "before Abraham was, I AM ;" or that other, "that with Him a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

Again, if we think of a succession of time, this implies a first moment, a part of time prior to the rest. We cannot conceive the one without the other ; and a *first moment* implies a beginning, which is inconsistent with *eternity*.

Lastly, for we need not enlarge on this head, the Omnipresence of God, which reason no less teaches, is another mystery. We cannot attempt to explain it without involving ourselves in a labyrinthine maze ; we can merely state the fact, but the *modus* or *manner* defies our utmost efforts to form a notion of it. If we suppose the Divine Essence to be every where like the smallest point, what do we mean ? Nor are we less surrounded with difficulties, if we suppose the Divine Essence to be infinitely extended, for extension is a property of matter, and cannot be predicated of an immaterial Being. The idea of it involves that of divisibility, which is repugnant to the notion of Deity. It is likewise that of a composition of parts, which is at variance with the singleness or unity of His nature.

It appears, then, that the existence of mysteries is not a characteristic of the Christian Revelation

exclusively, for the opinions which reason teaches us regarding the Supreme Being, are equally mysterious and incomprehensible. Yet these latter are believed by numbers who reject the doctrines of Christianity, on the plea that they are mysterious. There is nothing in the doctrine of the Trinity, and the other mysteries of the Gospel, more perplexing and inconceivable than there is in the Self-existence, the Eternity, and the Omnipresence of God; and it is therefore as reasonable to believe the one as the other. If right reason direct us to believe these attributes, notwithstanding their mysteriousness, she must, if consistent, direct us to believe the mysteries of Christianity. They must stand or fall together, for the case is exactly parallel; there is the same ground for assent, and the same argument for disbelief in both; they must, therefore, be admitted or rejected alike. To believe the one, and not the other, is manifest partiality, alike repugnant to equity and reason.

But leaving the consideration of the Divine Being, for we trust we have sufficiently shewn that the God of nature is equally mysterious with the God of Revelation, it may be well to

try the Infidel argument, "that the existence of mysteries is inconsistent with the truth of a statement," on a smaller scale, and ascertain thereby what amount of validity there may be in it.

Let us see whether in our philosophical and scientific researches, we reject the discoveries of the learned, because they involve matters which we cannot adequately explain or comprehend. In such an inquiry, however, it seems difficult to decide where to begin, for what else is philosophy to him who rightly understands it, than a loud proclamation of human weakness? We observe that a heavy body falls to the earth, we know not why, but we call it attracted. Yet what more is this than stating the phenomenon over again in other words? The terms in which we deliver our theories, as "Gravitation" and the like, are only specious representations of our utter inability to afford adequate explanations.

The whole economy of the inferior animal creation, is to us an inexplicable mystery. What we term *instinct* is simply a demonstration of our own ignorance. Neither know we what paints the Butterfly's wing, and gives its exqui-

site hue to the Violet's petal. We know not what prompts the Nightingale to warble forth his melodious sonnet, nor why his note should differ from that of the Raven. When we look into the domain of Chemistry, we cannot tell why the mixture of two *cold* substances should produce a *hot* one; why two *solids* should engender a *liquid*; why two *liquids* a *solid*; or why two colourless substances, commingled, should give one dyed with the beauties of vermilion.

In Metaphysical science, too, difficulties beset our path at every step. We form ideas of *abstractions*, and yet nothing can be more vague and shadowy than such ideás, still such ideas enter into our common and every-day belief. The union between soul and body must for ever remain a mystery, which man cannot hope to solve; and if we meditate on the respective bearings which these two substances have on each other, we shall quickly find ourselves in a labyrinth.

We cannot tell why matter should act on a substance so essentially different from it in kind; nor can we explain how an act of the will should

be accompanied by an action of the body, if such was willed. Every movement we make, every emotion we experience, every joy and every grief we feel, is a mystery; every effect which we can trace in the incorporeal part, from the injury or decay of the corporeal, is inexplicable, and not less calculated to defy our efforts at explanation, in every alteration in the outward condition of the body, produced by purely mental causes, which we can discover. These are our every-day observations, this is the daily belief of mankind, and yet it is full of mysteries.

In Mechanical science, mysteries stand equally thick. "Of *force*," says BERKELEY, "it is as difficult to form a notion, as of *grace*; and we cannot explain why a body when pressed by another should recede from its place." We say it moves, but as in other cases, we merely give names, and forget that the name is no demonstration of the mystery which we seek to know. We speak of a point, of a line, of a triangle, and yet of these ideas, apart from individuals, there is no prototype in Nature. We ask for distinct ideas in Revelation, and yet as

BERKELEY justly remarks, "words may not be void of signification, though they do not, every time they are used, call up a distinct idea in the mind." To take a familiar example, in summing up Pounds, Shillings, and Pence, we do not at every step think of the peculiar coins. And indeed, in no respect, perhaps, is the advantage of a truly judicious and philosophical cultivation of mind, more apparent than in its guarding us against the vulgar error of considering the things spoken of as easily comprehensible, in proportion as the names of them are common and familiar.

The Logician and the Algebraist^f are accustomed to the use of arbitrary symbols, and are well aware of the important fact, that we may reason justly, even when the terms which we employ are utterly unmeaning to us; and if they are careful to make due application of this principle, they should remember that though it may be a great convenience to have a *name* for something, of which we have but a very imperfect idea, we must not thence suppose that we have attained to the knowledge of it.

^f See Appendix B.

The existence of Mysteries in a Revelation cannot invalidate the moral certainty produced by its external evidences.

THERE are two modes in which the truth of a Revelation may be vindicated from the objections brought against it, from its possessing mysterious doctrines, either by proving that in the nature of things mysteries must enter into its composition ; or by a reference to the moral evidence on which we rest satisfied that it is a Revelation, and by shewing, that if that evidence be fitted to produce what is called *moral* certainty, we are bound to admit the Revelation, whatever may be the difficulties involved in some of its statements.

Of these two methods, we have already pursued the former ; and, without reference, as yet, to the supposed evidence on which a Revelation may be based, we have endeavoured to prove that there is no necessary incompatibility between the internal difficulties, which are termed mys-

teries, and its truth ; and therefore that, provided the external evidence be sound, no valid objections to the claims of the Revelation can exist.

In this question, two things merit consideration. The internal difficulties opposed apparently to the reputation of the evidence, and the soundness of the evidence as bearing up the character of the Revelation against internal difficulties.

We have shewn that the internal difficulties do not bring discredit on the reputation of the Revelation. But there is another way of proving this, by shewing that no apparent difficulties, provided they do not involve impossibilities, ought to outweigh external evidence, which conducts to moral certainty. Such is the nature of the evidence adduced in support of the Christian system, and we feel justified in pursuing this course of argument, because those adversaries of a Revelation, with whom we have to contend, do not deny the *possible* existence of external evidence in favour of its claims, but confine themselves to the position, that such evidence cannot outweigh internal improbabilities.

Of evidence there are various kinds, differing less in the degree of certainty acquired, than in the modes by which it is obtained. Passing by the simpler sorts of evidence which spring from consciousness, the senses, and axioms or self-evident truths, our attention becomes fixed on the two great branches of deductive evidence, Scientific, or Demonstrative, and Moral evidence.

These two species of evidence are characterised by different features, whether we view the subjects to which they are applicable, or the graduation of certainty which exclusively pertains to the latter, as contrasted with the fixed or absolute certainty which springs from the former; its sole object being essential or necessary truth. In simplicity too, and uniformity of proofs, demonstrative stands opposed to moral evidence. If the authority of the former seems greater, not less striking is the superior importance of the subject, about which moral evidence is conversant. Her domain extends over the whole region of nature and art; every thing that interests man, law, morals, and religion, acknowledges her sway.

The certainty which we attain by means of

this evidence, is termed *moral certainty*. Here the mere abstract possibility of things being otherwise, does not involve an absurdity, as is the case in demonstrative reasoning. Every reasonable ground of suspecting, however, that they are so, is totally excluded, and the evidence cannot be set aside without violating the common sense and reason of mankind. Of so high a kind is this evidence, that ordinary thinkers generally confound it with absolute certainty, and are not aware that the existence, for example, of London and Paris, is to them who have not seen them, only highly probable. In like manner we assert that it is highly probable that Christ and His Apostles performed the miracles which we find recorded in the narratives of the Evangelists; the case does not admit of scientific or demonstrative evidence, but falls within the province of moral evidence. The broad and ordinary limits that lie between certainty and uncertainty, are apparent to all; but to fix the exact boundaries that separate, in every case, absolute from moral certainty, is a task of no ordinary difficulty; the latter, in many cases, assuming the form and appearance of the former,

and in its value possessing no inferiority, although that value be derived from a source that seems not entitled to the name of rigorous demonstration.

Since we now take for granted, that those who derive an objection to Christianity, from the existence of internal difficulties, do not gainsay the moral evidence on which it rests, our present inquiry must be to the *extent* to which our assent is due to this moral evidence, in the face of the internal difficulties. Our present task is neither to soften down their difficulties, nor to explain how they may have found a place in the Revelation. Supposing they *are* in the Revelation, is the assent due to the *moral* evidence which conducts to *moral* certainty, sufficient to outweigh the difficulties attending the reception of some of its statements, provided these difficulties do not amount to absolute impossibilities?

In the common affairs of life, unless moral certainty were allowed to be a just and fair ground of conviction, unspeakable confusion would inevitably ensue; the administration of justice would cease; truth and confidence would

disappear, and the order and harmony of society would be broken. It is the intention of the Deity that we should be social creatures; but society cannot be upheld without mutual trust and confidence; and no truth can be reposed in any one, if those are not to be believed who give the strongest and most convincing proofs of integrity. These proofs were exhibited by the Apostles and first teachers of Christianity. Had this system been false the numerous converts in the first century could not have deemed it true. Amidst a variety of other proofs, the miraculous gifts professed to be given, must, if actually received, have been felt and known by them. ST. PAUL, in an epistle to the Corinthian Church, alludes to these gifts. Had no such gifts, therefore, existed, those to whom that epistle is addressed, must, instead of considering him a Divinely commissioned teacher, have regarded him as an audacious impostor; and the religion which he taught, must have fallen under the same imputation. But were it known by them to be false, it is utterly impossible to imagine that, at a time when the profession of the Christian faith was but another name for

persecution and death, they should profess their belief in it; unless we resort to the very untenable hypothesis, that they loved persecution for its own sake. If we can seriously believe this alternative, we may believe any thing, or nothing, under so capricious a mode of estimating and accepting probabilities, society would not exist for a day.

But if we deny what is morally certain here, we must always deny what is morally certain; and if we believe on moral certainty, in the daily concerns of life, we are also bound to believe here. We may vainly wish to have absolute or demonstrative certainty, when the nature of the case forbids it, and to request the appropriate evidence for the facts under review, because another kind cannot be supplied, would only be equalled by the folly of him who should reject whatever he does not hear with his eye, or see with his ear. "He that should go to Revelation," says the eloquent BISHOP TAYLOR, "to prove that nine and nine make eighteen would be a fool; and he would be no less that goes about to prove a Trinity of persons by natural reason. Every thing must be derived from its own

foundations." But, in such questions, he goes on to remark, "my reason is set on work; first I inquire into the testimony or ways of probation, if *they be worth believing in what they say*, my reason seeks it out. As if I be told that God said 'There are three and one in Heaven,' I ask, who said it? Is he credible? Why? If I find that all things satisfy my reason, I believe him saying that God said so; and the *πιστις* or faith enters. I believe the thing also, not because I can prove it directly, for I cannot, but I can prove it indirectly; testimony and authority are my argument, and that is sufficient. The Apostles entered into much of their faith by their senses, they saw many articles of their creed; but as they which saw and believed were blessed, so they which see not, but are argued and disputed into their faith, and believe what they find reasonable to believe, shall have the reward of their faith, while they wisely follow their reason."^g

The same eminent Divine, in another part of his works, remarks that, "when we discourse of mysteries, of faith, and articles of religion, it

^g Ductor Dubitantium. *Book I. sec. 22.*

is certain that the greatest reason in the world, to which all other reasons must yield, is this,—God hath said it, therefore, it is true.”^h Now the external evidences of the Christian religion go to prove the Minor premiss of this argument ; namely, that “God has said it” ; and these evidences, we have seen, are such as to produce moral certainty. Those, therefore, who still object to the mysteries of the Christian Revelation, commit the absurdity of admitting the Major and Minor premisses in a syllogism, (the Major being, “that what God says is true”) and yet rejecting the conclusion ; a conduct utterly at variance with the first principles of reasoning. In such questions, though we have not that certainty of truth, that we do not err, which would be gained were the contrary supposition immediately proved to be absurd, yet we have the same certainty on which, in worldly matters, we find no difficulty in forming our belief, and it may well be called unreasonable to ask for more. If the evidence be of an obligatory character, we are bound to admit it, and if we take into account the character of God, his

^h Jeremy Taylor on JOHN vi. - *Works*, Vol. 10, p. 16.

truthfulness, and his goodness, we shall arrive at such a degree of certainty, as to find it unassailable by every objection that does not amount to absolute impossibility. If there be no impossibility in the nature of the things, then we have no reason to urge why, for any thing we can tell, some rational solution of them, may not be given. One thing, however, is impossible, that God should so mislead us, as to cause us to be led by such evidence as would have this effect, in a matter of the utmost importance. We are bound to acquiesce in moral certainty, for the contrary would immediately lead us into an absurdity. If a conviction and belief, founded on moral proofs, that we cannot shake, should prove erroneous, then we, who, by the laws of our Being, are formed to acquiesce in such proofs, are, by the Author of our Being, led into error. A notion so incompatible with just notions of the Divinity, as fairly to fall under the imputation of absurdity. The only difference then, between Demonstrative and Moral evidence, is this, that the direction of the former leads directly and immediately, the latter indirectly and mediately into absurdity. But no absurdity is involved in

believing upon indubitable proofs, statements, that without such proofs, we should have considered erroneous. The inhabitant of a warm country, if he were well assured of the veracity of one who came from a colder climate, would be perfectly justified in believing him, when told the fact, that in *his* country water is found to freeze; though antecedently to such assertion, he might not have conceived such a thing possible.ⁱ In truth, such an assent is daily given in the common affairs of life, and the remark usually made on hearing a strange narrative, "I should not have believed it possible, if you had not told me," is familiar to every one.

If, however, we withhold our assent from what is founded upon moral certainty, it is difficult to estimate the absurdities to which we are immediately reduced; we are virtually striking a blow at the very root of all social life, the obligations that bind society together would be dissolved, and misery and ruin would be the sad results. No objections against Christianity can counter-balance the conclusion, that if this system be not true, a door is opened for the

ⁱ See LOCKE's account of the King of Bantam.

admission of the most unheard-of difficulties, a total disbelief of every thing which we have not ourselves witnessed ; the credibility of human testimony is destroyed, and the practical affairs of life are paralyzed by a scepticism, compared to which, that which intrudes into the domains of philosophy is but little to be regretted. It is in a word to make the astounding assertion, that several thousands of men, who could not have been deceived, as to the reality of certain public miracles which were immediately presented to their senses, entered into a league to induce the rest of the world to believe that *they* were thoroughly convinced of the truth of them, and of Christianity, (both being false) and that they adhered to this statement to the very last, not only without advancing their *own* interest, but even directly against it. This is the inexplicable mystery which is involved in the system of him who rejects Christianity.

In considering the validity of any evidence, nothing is more common even with good reasoners than to call off attention from the proofs, to the thing to be proved. This distinction, however, ought not to be overlooked, nor ought

we, because difficulties seem to lie in the thing to be proved, therefore, to impute these difficulties to the proofs, and to fancy that *they* are beset with obstacles to their reception, which do, in no respect, belong to them. In moral evidence it is a rule that no objections which may be urged, merely against the thing to be proved, provided they fall short of absolute impossibilities, ought to bring us to withhold our assent from the *proofs*. All our assent is built on the proofs or evidences, and whilst *they* remain uninjured, equally unbroken ought our assent to remain. Nothing proves a thing to be untrue, except that which destroys the argument by which it is proved to be a truth. This rule is observed in Philosophy, and no reason can be shewn why it should not equally hold in Religion. When we have established, on its own proper evidence, that body of truths which we term the Copernican system, no difficulties that seem to exist in the system, and apparent difficulties are not wanting, destroys for one moment our assent to the theory. We know that it has been established by its own proper evidence, and we rest satisfied.

It is difficult to imagine that a body so heavy as our Earth, should whirl through space with the rapidity which Astronomers ascribe to it; but no one thinks of denying the accuracy of their conclusions, simply from this consideration. If we felt dissatisfied, we should look to the proof—not to the apparent consequences. The mass of mankind admit as true all the chief discoveries of science, although they seem to *them* to contain things hard to be understood, solely on human testimony; and without such testimony they would have rejected them as in many cases absurd.

It has often been remarked that truth is more wonderful than fiction, and yet on appropriate evidence we hesitate not to give our assent to the wonders which an examination of the Almighty's workmanship is sure to develope. In such cases our Reason and our Faith are equally concerned; our Reason deals with the evidences, and our Faith or Belief then admits the conclusions, referring to the former faculty the task of investigating the proofs. Happy would it be if men could be content to act similarly in the greater concerns of religion; if

they could see that there the appropriate task of their reason is to sift, weigh, and scrutinize the evidences adduced to shew that the Revelation we hold in our hands is really from God, and that this being performed, it becomes the bounden duty of *Faith* to assume an absolute sway over the domain now subjected to her sceptre! Reason ought to stand at the portals of the mind, and to her Christianity must deliver her credentials, but when Reason is satisfied of their genuineness, she ought then to give way, and forbear to usurp over this new claimant for admittance into our hearts, that part which rightly belongs to her alone.

It appears then, that improbabilities, which result from the nature of the thing, may be over-ruled and overcome, by positive proofs; here is the propriety of this *difficulty* to be seen. Of the *Nature* of things, we are, in a great measure, utterly ignorant, their essence is not known to us, and the scanty knowledge which we do possess regarding them, is only the fair side of a picture, whose reverse is enveloped in darkness, and where innumerable questions are presented to us which we are unable to solve.

Far different, is it with the proofs, or evidences, for the reality of what we believe ; though the internal nature of the things themselves be obscure, yet these may lie open to our apprehension, and their clearness and form may be such as to challenge the assent of every sound-minded inquirer. He who brings objections against the evidences of the Christian Revelation, deserves our attentive and sober hearing. But such hearing has already been given. Every possible variety of objection has been brought, weighed in the balance and found wanting ; and the proofs for this Religion have come forth as gold from the furnace, seven times purified. Nor would objections against the matter of the Revelation, be worthy of refutation, provided they went to prove that it contained things impossible, or of an immoral tendency ; for either of these signs would prove that the Infinite Source of Purity, could not be its author. The field has been open, but no one has yet dared to bring such an objection against the Christian system ; should any attempt it, their signal defeat would speedily afford a salutary warning to others. Nothing, however short of Impossi-

bility or Immorality, will injure the cause of Christianity. Our insufficiency to judge of the true purport and bearing of a Revelation from God, must blunt the edge of every other objection. But this insufficiency does not invalidate the *external* proofs on which we decide that the Revelation is genuine, for these lie not beyond, but within, the full scope and range of our faculties.

It must, however, ever remain an arduous task to fix in matters that be far beyond the range of the human intellect, where probability ends, and impossibility commences. A thick haze lies on the border land, and we cannot pierce it. Yet the following consideration will, perhaps, assist us in forming our judgment in the matter.

We ought to enquire, at the outset, whether the question regards finite or infinite beings,—for if the former alone be concerned, our facility of arriving at a correct result, is greatly enhanced; if, however, the question concerns the Infinite Intelligence, it is evident that the extreme distance at which He stands removed from our observation, must ever per-

clude the hope of taking a full survey of His nature. To attempt it is, if we may use the comparison, as if an astronomer should make an observation on the action and properties of some far distant star—the existence of which had required the utmost efforts of his telescope to discover. The distinction then of things contrary to our reason must ever be borne in mind, and a heavy censure belongs to those who would seek to involve the mysteries of the Christian faith, that so clearly belong to the former class, in the sentence of condemnation due only to the latter.

Things contrary to our reason are impossibilities—of things above our reason, it is absurd to decide that they are so ; for of their nature we cannot adequately form a judgment. Many an error has arisen by regarding the mysteries of the Christian Revelation as things positive rather than negative. It is the absence of explanation on the one hand, and the absence of capacity to understand any explanation on the other, that constitutes a mystery—and the wise forbearance of the Divine Being in not obtruding on our notice more than we can bear,

has been weakly wrested into an argument against his Revelation.

The mysteries of our faith are like the dark spots on the Sun's disc. It is only the common enquirer who discovers them, for we may truly assert, that a blaze of light is cast around them, and a judicious reasoner would rather be disposed to feel grateful that so much has been revealed, for on every question that it concerns humanity to know, and to know which, the brightest intellect had wished and struggled—the blaze of meridian splendour has been flung, and those dark truths which, in vain, he longed to know, have been gilded with a radiance that even the child and peasant can now perceive them. Yes, never let us forget the debt of gratitude that we owe for the incalculable value of what *has* been revealed, for *that* is the true point to contemplate, and the objections that spring from the mysteries that are mingled with it, will all speedily take their flight, like the obscene and ugly birds of night before the bright shining of the sun. But the mysteries of the Christian Revelation are not merely negative, but they are also positive ; it should also be kept

in mind that they have a relative, not an absolute signification, and this term has respect to the understanding of him to whom the thing is mysterious. When we remember that there is in the Universe an Infinite Mind, it may almost appear a trueism to assert, that there is no doctrine *absolutely* and in itself mysterious, that is, above the comprehension of all understandings. Surely the various relations of things are *capable* of being comprehended. And since, as we have remarked, there is in the Universe this Being, one of whose attributes is the possession of all-knowledge, we are satisfied that these relations and properties are actually understood and comprehended. Nothing then is *per se* mysterious; the mysteriousness of a thing arises merely from the nature of the intellect to which it is submitted, and the term possesses therefore merely a relative signification.

From this consideration it necessarily flows, since a doctrine is so far *to any man* mysterious, as he cannot or does not comprehend it, that if a mysterious doctrine be therefore false, the inevitable consequence, as BISHOP CONYBEARE

remarks,^j is, “that the knowledge of the most ignorant person is the standard of truth, that there can be no *real* difference in men’s intellectual attainments, and no *real progress* made in knowledge.”

“For, if every mysterious doctrine be *false*; and if every doctrine, not comprehended by the most *ignorant* person, be *to him* mysterious; then every *such* doctrine is false. It follows that *all* truth is by him comprehended; *i. e.* that *his* understanding is the measure of truth; that no man can be *really* more knowing than another; and no man really more knowing at one time, than at another. So fruitful is one absurdity of many more.”

From this digression, into which we have been led, in our endeavour to place on a proper footing—the objection that would be derived against the Christian Revelation and the evidence on which it rests, were it found to contain impossibilities,—let us in lowlier strain remark that if such a thing is attainable, as a proper and undoubted certainty of fact, there is such a

^j See CONYBEARE’S Discourse on Scripture Mysteries, to which I am indebted for some hints.

moral certainty from the evidence which supports Christianity. Now to resist the strength of moral certainty is to offer a violence to our nature. In no case, except in Religion, do we resist it, and it may therefore be reasonably contended, that if we do not in that, it can only be owing to some peculiarity either in Religion that causes us to do it, or to some peculiarity in ourselves, which is affected by this Religion. Both of these is the case. Religion stands distinguished from every other thing, by being of an obligatory nature, and it is this that makes us fond of every little cavil, and willing, at any rate, to depreciate it, when, to a reasonable mind, it ought to recommend it most of all. In ourselves may be detected, by every one who is not afraid to look within, "an evil heart of unbelief," which produces in us a wrong bias; for a man must struggle hard, and labour not to be convinced, who is not convinced by evidence which, in every other department of thought, would immediately carry conviction along with it.

Yet far stronger still, could we rightly feel, is the inducement to give up our minds to this evidence. He who listens to the *better* sugges-

tions of his heart, will recognise a potent motive for acquiescence ; for he will never be liable to bring himself to the melancholy conclusion, that God should leave his creatures, in practical affairs, in a doubtful state, with no more certain information of his will, than unfounded, and and often contradictory surmiseses ; and if moral certainty is to be disregarded, without a possibility of ever coming to a fixed resolution, in whatever might be presented to their notice. We cannot suppose that God would cast the brilliant hues of truth around the hideous deformities of Falsehood, and it is our duty, therefore, to follow the irresistible bias of our minds, sanctioned by every idea which we can form of His nature and workings, to acquire what presents so firm, and withal so sound, an array of evidence as the Christian Revelation ; so full and convincing, as to form an evidence to strong, and so clearly evincing the truth of this Revelation, as to leave it impossible that the existence of mysteries or any other internal difficulty, *should ever form a solid argument against it.*

The benefits resulting from *Mysteries*.

HAVING now gone through the several branches of the subject, we will, in conclusion, take a brief retrospective view of the ground over which we have traversed.

To vindicate the existence of *Mysteries in a Revelation*, we at first endeavoured to shew that it was quite possible for a Revelation to contain mysteries without having its *genuineness* at all affected thereby—we produced reasons for believing that the object for which the Supreme Being would at any time make a Revelation to his creatures, would be a practical one; *i. e.* its design would be the regulation of their conduct, either towards the Supreme Being himself, or towards each other—we found also that the calculation of these practical duties involved or implied a relation between the two parties—of which one was to *pay* obedience and the other *receive* it. When one of the parties was the Almighty himself, we shewed that there

were weighty reasons for expecting that this expressed or implied relationship would give us some notions of certain properties of his nature, which like Deity would be far beyond the power of our mind to understand completely.

Taking the object of a Revelation to be a practical one, we proceeded to shew that mysteries would not be adverse to it, but on the contrary would be favourable to that design, and indeed we proved that we ought to expect them to appear in every Revelation which was made to us, and if mysteries are a necessary element in a Revelation, then it followed, that the absence of them would be an argument against its truth, and the necessary result of that was, that the existence of mysteries in a Revelation, *forms no solid argument against its truth.*

Up to this point we refrained from alluding to any particular Revelation, but as the Christian Revelation is the only one which is opposed, and the only one which we believe to be true, and therefore worth defending, we next proceeded in the discussion of the question with reference to that single Revelation. In the outset of this

part of the subject, it was clearly pointed out that the Christian Revelation *does* contain mysteries, a fact denied even by some who believe it to be of Divine origin; we proceeded to bring our preceding remarks to apply to the case of this Revelation, to accomplish which we demonstrated that the object of the Christian Revelation was a practical one, and that the explanation of the mysteries contained in it, formed no part of its design; it was seen also that the existence of mysteries in the Christian Revelation was not only agreeable to what we might have expected to find, but also that it was necessary that it should contain mysteries. For one purpose of the Revelation was to reveal to us an account of the Supreme Being, so far as it was necessary we should know him in order to pay him the worship he demanded, and even the smallest knowledge of him has in it many particulars of his greatness, which are beyond our power to comprehend; yea, the knowledge of him which we can attain to, independent of Revelation, contains many of the very same mysteries which we find on the page of Revelation. Moreover we extended our observations

from the Supreme Being to sublunary objects, and we found that nearly every thing with which we had to do, contained mysteries in it, and if Philosophy and Science are not rejected, though they contain mysteries, why should Theology?

Believing that the object of the Revelation was a practical one, we found reasons sufficient to convince us, that a fuller explanation of these mysterious things would not be given us, and, indeed, in our present state, could not be given us.

And further, it appearing to us, that there were two ways in which the Christian Revelation could be vindicated from objections brought against it, on account of its containing mysterious doctrines, and having proved that from the nature of things, mysteries must enter into its composition, we proceeded to the next mode, and endeavoured to establish the position that we, whatever may be the alleged difficulties involved in some of its statements, are *bound* to receive the Christian Revelation on account of the moral certainty produced by its external evidences, and consequently, that its *containing mysteries forms no solid argument against its truth.*

We do not venture to assert that mysteries have been inserted into the Revelation for the purpose of producing certain moral effects, but we are justly warranted in regarding those uses to which they are applicable; if not of causes, we may regard them in the light of consequences, and their existence shows we find them. Thus, even from the dark spots, as it were, in the surface of the *great Sun of Revelation*, may be derived beams of light. The practical utility of these parts of Revelation is of the mediate or indirect kind—but still it is not less striking; since “*all Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness,*” we have no reason to expect that even the most mysterious doctrines will form an exception; they have a value,—though one peculiar,—and thus, even though now their value is so resplendent, that the eye and the mind of man cannot enter and behold their glory; yet a time will come when the sight and the mind of man shall be purified, in that day the dark things will become plain, and the *glorified being* will declare that the mystery of God is finished.

The inscrutable *nature* of the Divine Being is

well calculated to fill our minds with sentiments of humility. If, when we survey the vastness of the material Universe, and rise from "nature up to nature's God," we are lost in wonder and admiration, and the insignificance of our own state, stamps us with the littleness of our being, the same effect is produced by a contemplation of this intelligence as exhibited in the page of Revelation. For there, too, His footsteps may be traced, by the wonders that surround them; and there the higher attributes of character, moral worth, love, mercy, justice, and truth, become the glittering marvels that the contemplation brings before us. There, too, man may contrast the insignificancy of his own nature, with the greatness of the Being who formed him, and when he finds his highest efforts are not sufficient to grasp the nature and properties of this Being, the pride of his reason is checked, his presumption is rebuked, as forcibly as if the command had rung audibly in his ears, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further."

Of all the virtues, *Humility* is that, which is the most characteristic of the Christian religion. If we were to adopt, in forming a system of

Christian morality, the threefold division of duties which is commonly employed, those duties which refer to God, our neighbour, and to ourselves,—we might form a code brief indeed, in its enunciation, but goodly and fair in the practical application of it. We should say that the feeling demanded by our religion towards God and our fellow creatures is *Love*, and that which is to be exercised by each one, with reference to himself, is the mild grace of *Humility*.

They are thus set forth :—

Feeling towards God.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” “This is the first and great commandment.”^k

Feeling towards others.

“I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”^l “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink :

^k Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

^l Matt. v. 44.

for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.”^m “I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.”ⁿ “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”^o “A new commandment (said Jesus) I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I loved you, that ye also love one another.”^p “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.” “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.”^r “A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he (the certain man who fell among thieves) was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

^m Rom. xii. 20. ⁿ 2 Tim. i. 3. ^o Matt. xxii. 39. ^p John xiii. 34. ^q 1 John iv. 10, 11, 21. ^r James ii. 8.

And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two-pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, take care of him ; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.”^s

Feeling towards ourselves.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”^t “Whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”^u “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich in that he is made low.”^v “I charge every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. Mind not high things but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.”^w “Who maketh thee to differ from another ? and what hast thou, that thou didst not receive ? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ?”^x

^s Luke x. 33. 35. ^t Matt. v. 3. ^u Matt. xviii. 4. ^v James i. 9, 10. ^w Rom. xii. 3, 16. ^x 1 Cor. iv. 7.

“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Humble yourselves therefore in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”^y “In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”^z

Intellectual pride is one of the chief enemies of this virtue. He who fancies that his mind is fitted to embrace the highest themes, will find it hard to acknowledge that “Whatsoever is Divine Revelation ought to overrule all our opinions, prejudices, and interests, and hath a right to be received with full assent,” and although “Such a submission as this of our reason to faith, takes not away the land-marks of knowledge, although this shakes not the foundation of reason, but leaves us that use of our faculties for which they were given us.”^a He will find it difficult to bring down his high thoughts, and meekly, as a little child, receive the word of life. We know no discipline more wholesome, or better calculated to teach such an one the real state of his mental powers, their

^y James iv. 6. 7, 10. ^z Phil. ii. 3.

^a LOCKE, Book iv. c. xviii. p. 10.

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weakness, and the limited range of their efforts, than to contemplate any one of the great mysteries of our faith. Upon these the favourite operations of the human mind cannot be brought to bear, and we are led to look also upon objects in creation, that are past our finding out. The mind is brought to rely on the testimony, and to become "the meek recipient of intelligence, to be taken without questioning, honoured with belief when it cannot be cleared by exposition." Thus we see that even from those parts of the Revelation which seem, at first sight, to present nought to our understanding save subjects of barren speculation, God has enabled us to derive lessons in that grace, the frequent inculcation of which, distinguishes Christianity from every other system of belief.

The correlative of *humility*, with reference to ourselves, is *reverence and awe* towards the great Maker of the Universe, and so closely are these moral graces connected, that he who possesses the one cannot be deficient in the other. They may, in fact, be termed the same feeling, operating in opposite directions. The man who, when he looks to the majesty and mysteriousness

of Jehovah's character, is lost in reverence and awe, has no time, when he casts a glance at his own weakness, for ought save the lowliest thoughts.

In truth, veneration is no other than the homage of a lowly mind. Reverence, then, is another practical advantage which we derive from the existence of mysteries. We cannot but feel veneration for the great Being, whose nature is so vast as to elude our every effort to comprehend, and not all the brilliant and glorious wonders which he has so plentifully strewed around this our dwelling-place, are better fitted to produce such emotions, than the silent meditation of our own minds, on the nature and condition of his existence. Such meditations will speedily become a Revelation, at once of his greatness, and of our weakness.

"All Eminency," says one of our great Divines,^b "is worshipped with Humility, Reverence, and Submission, that is, as we are wont and rightly to speak, *By keeping a distance*. Therefore the Sovereign or Supreme excellency of God must be adored with the lowest demission and *greatest*

^b MEDE, Vol. 1. page 310, 311.

stoop the soul can make. We finde, by experience, that that disposition of the eye which fits us to behold the visible sun, makes a man blinde when he looketh down upon himself; so here, the apprehension of the transcendent excellency of God, ten thousand times brighter than the sun, if truly admitted into our hearts, will darken all overweening conceit of any worthiness in ourselves. The greater we would apprehend his power—the more sensible we must be of our weakness. The greater we acknowledge his goodness, the less goodness we must see in ourselves. The more we would apprehend his wisdom, the less we are to be puffed up with our own knowledge. As in a pair of skales, the higher we would raise one skale, the lower we pull down the other; so the higher we raise God in our hearts, the lower we must depress ourselves.

Hence we finde the *humblest* natures and *the most humbled condition* to be the fittest for devotion; I say, the *humblest natures* are the most pliable and aptest to Religion; whereas those which the world is wont to commend for brave spirits, of all others buckle the worst thereto.

But let the world fancy what it will, God seeth not as a man seeth. It is not the tallest *Elijah*, but the *humblest David*, who is the *man after God's own heart*. He that *humbleth himself as a little childe*, the same is the tallest and goodliest soul for the kingdome of God.

The stars in the firmament, howsoever they here seem small to us, yet are bigger than the earth. So he that is despicable and small here in the eyes of men, is a great one in the eyes of God. Let those, therefore, that think all worth resides in a lofty and brave spirit, remember that the Devil was a braver fellow than any of them all, and that his high and lofty spirit was the cause of his downfall and apostasie from his Creator, and so of that damnation to everlasting fire prepared for him and his Angels.

And as the *humblest nature*, so the *humblest* or *most humbled state and condition*, is the fittest also for the exercise of devotion, as the poor and mean rather than the rich and full. Wherefore *Agur* desired of God, *not to give him more food then was convenient for him, lest being full he should deny him, and say, who is the Lord?* Such likewise is the state of adversity and afflic-

tion ; whence is it that God useth this discipline of his corrections and judgments, to make us crouch and bow down unto him, when he seeth us ready to forget him. Whence DAVID^c pronounceth the man blessed, whom the Lord chastiseth, and^d *Before I was afflicted*, saith he, *I went astray ; but now have I kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn thy statutes.*

For diseases, say the Physicians, must be cured by contraries. It was *Pride* that caused the disloyalty and rebellion both of men and Angels against their God and maker. Whence is that of *Syracides*. “The beginning of pride is, when one departeth from God, and his heart is turned away from his Maker. For pride is the beginning of sin, and he that hath it shall pour out abomination ; and therefore the Lord will bring upon them strange calamities, and overthrow them utterly.”^e

If pride be the beginning of our rebellion against God, then must *Lowliness* be the proper disposition of those who fear and worship him ;

^c PSALM xciv. 12. ^d PSALM cxix. 67, 71.

^e ECCLESIASTICUS x. 12, 13.

and so, *Tanto quisque est vilior Deo, quanto est pretiosior Sibi*: *The higher any one is in his own esteem, the lower is he in God's.*

Lastly, the Revelations regarding the moral state of man, which the Christian religion conveys to us, and some of these may fitly be ranked among its mysteries, are well calculated to produce in us the most lowly estimate of ourselves. Man is a changeable creature, a mortal creature, for from the infant that hangs upon its mother's bosom, to the old man who sinks under the decrepitude of years, we see death in all its woeful and affecting varieties ; but, above all, he is a sinful creature ; without repentance and faith in Christ, a creature destined to never-ending misery ; surely then with the wise man *pride* can have no proper resting-place, he carries within himself a sufficient cause for humiliation, and whenever he looks into the secret recesses, or surveys the black spots on his heart, he cannot but be abased in his own eyes.

But, in conclusion, the Christian Mysteries are not devoid of lessons of a more cheering and inspiring nature—we believe that the mist will not always hang over them ; we cannot

think that the grey dawn will always continue ; the perfect day must come at last—and then shall we know even as we are known. Every mystery that now perplexes us—every obscurity that now clogs our vision—may be construed into an argument, and a reason for hope. No ! we cannot cast aside the mysteries of Revelation in all our doubts and despair ; when the dark cloud is passing over our souls—and the awful land of shadows seems to approach us with its hastening gloom—these very doubts will array themselves in light—as the sure pledges of a coming illumination. The light that beams forth from the Lamb that sits upon the throne of Heaven, will shine with so bright a lustre, and diffuse such a kindly and nourishing warmth, as utterly to drive away the damp and noxious vapours that may have hovered around our minds in this imperfect state of our existence—the mysteries of Revelation will then be clearly seen to have “formed no solid argument against its truth,” for the veil that now shrouds the Ancient of Days will be rent, and we shall behold Him as He is—and in the clear light of Himself, understand Him.



Appendix.

Appendix A.

MUCH diversity of opinion exists with reference to the nature and validity of the arguments by which the existence of the soul, after death, is generally attempted to be proved. We speak here of proofs derived merely from unaided reason. Of the validity of such proofs, it would be difficult in some respects, in the present state of human intelligence, to form an adequate notion, for *we* have the great truth which *they* seek to establish, placed upon a firmer foundation by the Christian Revelation ; and amid the blaze of light which is there cast on man's future destiny, it is as difficult to attempt a survey of it by the glimmering rays which unaided reason diffuses around it, as it would be to attempt amid the effulgence of the midday beam to estimate the exact amount of light cast on a given object by the twinkling of a taper.

Fortunately, however, we are in possession of the reasonings of men whose researches were conducted entirely by that scanty light which

Human reason can fling over the dark scenes of the future; and an attentive consideration of their remains will shew us both what unaided reason can, and what it cannot discover; will shew us the mode by which such investigations may be instituted, and the certainty or uncertainty which attaches to the conclusions to which they lead. In the writings of PLATO and XENOPHON,^f for example, we have this subject expressly treated; and amid the voluminous remains of the Roman Orator we find frequent discussions of the same topic. The following is the course of argument commonly employed. To prove the immortality of the soul, its immateriality must previously be established. In every combination of matter we find certain qualities which uniformly present themselves; and every phenomenon of matter may be adequately explained by their aid. The most intricate mechanism is merely the product of combinations of matter acting according to the laws impressed on it by Nature; Length, Breadth, Thickness, the Elements of solid extension are its essential properties, without which it could not exist:

^f See *Phaedo* and *Cympaedia*.

but if we consult the evidence afforded by our mental consciousness, we become introduced to a new set of qualities, differing from these not in degree but in kind, and derive from thence a conviction that the substance which possesses these properties is not material. No possible combination of material substances can, as far as we know, evolve an immaterial quality ; can produce a thought or a feeling ; that, therefore, which *does* produce such qualities cannot be matter. So on the other hand, we find that the immaterial substance which we call mind has none of the properties of matter ; we cannot conceive of extension or occupation of space as belonging to a thought or a wish. Now that which has no extension cannot be conceived of as consisting of parts ; that which has neither length nor breadth cannot be supposed susceptible of division ; and that which has no parts and cannot be divided, cannot be destroyed ; it is indestructable, and therefore immortal. Such is a brief sketch of the reasoning employed by philosophers to prove the immortality of the Human Soul.

One serious difficulty attending this argument

is, that it is equally applicable to the thinking or immaterial principle which exists in the lower animals. For they too have in them the seeds or rudiments of intelligence, and when we term this instinct, we are merely concealing our ignorance under a specious name. The brutes have at least sensation and memory; and these are immaterial qualities. The force of this objection has been perceived by philosophers, and the late DR. BROWN,^g the author of the *Philosophy of the Human Mind*, has frankly acknowledged its force. But the argument under review is liable to other objections; it does not appear to have produced a settled conviction even in those who originally employed it. Of the doubts and perplexities which beset the mind of CICERO on this subject, the most inattentive reader of his philosophical works will find ample proofs; and, from the nature of the case, the doubts rather than the convictions of this great and good man must have been the common portion of the Heathen world.

The truth is, as PALEY justly remarks, “the Immortality of the Soul was but one guess

^g See his *Life* by DR. WELSH.

among many." And though nothing may perhaps seem more decided than the expression, "*Ominun amini sunt immortales*," yet in another place CICERO seems rather to acquiesce in this *belief*, (if we may so term it) as a pleasing delusion, too agreeable to be dismissed from the mind, than as a firmly established truth: "*Si in hoc erro, quod animos hominum immortales esse credam, labenter erro; nec mihi hunc errorem, quo delector, idem vivo extorqueri volo.*"^h What is this but playing with his convictions, and substituting the agreeableness of a proposition for the evidence on which it ought to rest?

But the Heathen world were not singular in these doubts and uncertainties. BISHOP WARBURTON has, we think, fully shewn that the immortality of the soul made no part of the common creed, even of the Jewish people, and that we may adopt, in its fullest sense, the express declaration of Holy Writ, that "Life and Immortality were brought to light in the Gospel." Whilst the higher and more practical advantages which we owe to Christianity are gratefully confessed, let this striking feature of the Christian's

^h Cato Major. *ad finem*.

faith never be forgotten. The noble passage in PALEY on this subject, will immediately occur to every one; "Had Jesus Christ delivered no other declaration than the following, 'the hour is coming in the which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation;' he had pronounced a message of inestimable importance, and well worthy of that splendid apparatus of prophecy and miracles, with which his mission was introduced and attested; a message in which the wisest of mankind would rejoice to find an answer to their doubts, and rest to their enquiries. It is idle to say that a future state had been discovered already; it had been discovered as the Copernican system was, it was one guess among many. He alone discovers who *proves*; and no man can prove this point but the teacher who testifies, by miracles, that his doctrine comes from his God."ⁱ

ⁱ PALEY Mor. Phil. Book v. conclusion. We do not intend, by giving this passage, to have it inferred that we give approval to DR. PALEY'S Mor. Phil. We think it is neither Philosophical in its arrangement, nor sound in its principles.

To ascertain the existence of the Human Soul after death, is, however, merely the prelude to another enquiry: what is the *nature* of that existence, and what connection exists, between variety of moral character in this world, and allotment of condition in the next? "*Animi bonorum et fortium sunt divini*," is the assertion of CÍCERO, and it remains that we endeavour to ascertain the extent of its truth. I know not a more deeply interesting question than that which regards the future condition, the future happiness or misery of the Heathen world. It is one of those inscrutable things that the Divinity has shrouded in darkness, but into which human curiosity is ever, though vainly, endeavouring to pry. Nor let such curiosity be deemed highly culpable. The grateful disciple of a PLATO or a CÍCERO naturally pictures to himself the felicity which must arise from communicating, in a future scene, with those masters of wisdom, from whose lips flows to him a sound, as the Old Bard expresses it, "sweeter than honey;" but such hopes are embarrassed when he reflects on the extremely imperfect views which seem to have passed current in the Heathen world, re-

garding the very qualities that enter into the composition of virtue and vice. This objection would be very strongly felt by one who should interpret the expression "*fortium*" in its literal sense. May we not, however, be permitted to take it in a wider signification, and view it as embracing all the various species of energy and strength of character? Firmness and decision are nobler qualities than mere physical courage, and may more fitly claim to be associated with the epithet "good." Such is the character which CICERO declares to be truly divine. But *our* religion speaks more definitely on this point, and our own language, to quote the remark of an elegant writer,^j informs us "who is the *most God-like*, viz.—*the most Godly*." It is the man whose character has been brought into closest conformity with that of the Supreme Being; in whose heart the Divine Spirit has sown the seeds of "whatsoever things are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report," that is the best entitled to claim the epithets employed by the Heathen moralist, "*bonus et fortis*." Of such a man it may be said that he is truly divine.

^j C. J. HARE, *Guesses at Truth. First Series.*

Appendix B.

PERHAPS I may be told that although things which are incomprehensible occur in our physical and mixed enquiries, they have no place in "*pure* mathematics, where all is not only demonstrable, but intelligible." This, again, is an assertion which I cannot admit; and for the denial of which I shall beg leave to produce my reasons, as this will, I apprehend, make still more in favour of my general argument. Now, here it is known geometers can *demonstrate* that there are curves which approach continually to some fixed right line, without the possibility of ever meeting it. Such, for example, are hyperbolas, which continually approach towards their asymptotes, but cannot possibly meet them, unless an assignable finite space can become equal to nothing. Such, again, are conchoids, which continually approach to their directrices, yet can never meet them, unless a certain point can be both beyond and in contact with a given line at the same moment. Mathematicians can

also demonstrate that a space *infinite* in one sense may, by its rotation, generate a solid of *finite capacity*; as is the case with the solid formed by the rotation of a logarithmic curve of infinite length upon its axis, or that formed by the rotation of an Apollonian hyperbola upon its asymptote. They can also show in numerous instances that a variable space shall be continually augmenting, and yet never become equal to a certain finite quantity: and they frequently make transformations with great facility and neatness, by means of expressions to which no definite ideas can be attached. Can we, for example, obtain any clear comprehension, or indeed any notion at all, of the value of a power whose exponent is an *acknowledged* imaginary quantity, as $x \sqrt{-1}$? Can we, in like manner, obtain any distinct idea of a series constituted of an *infinite* number of terms? In each case the answer, I am convinced must be in the negative. Yet the science, in which these and numerous other *incomprehensibles* occur, is called *Mathesis*, THE DISCIPLINE, because of its incomparable superiority to other studies in evidence and certainty, and, therefore,

its singular adaptation to discipline the mind. And this, notwithstanding these *mysteries*, (for are they not such?) is the science, says the eloquent and profound DR. BARROW, "which effectually exercises, not vainly deludes, nor vexatiously torments, studious minds with obscure subtleties, perplexed difficulties, or contentious disquisitions; which overcomes without opposition, triumphs without pomp, compels without force, and rules absolutely without any loss of liberty; which does not privately overreach a weak faith, but openly assaults an armed reason, obtains a total victory, and puts on inevitable chains." How does it happen, now, that when the investigation is bent towards objects which cannot be comprehended, the mind arrives at that in which it acquiesces *as certainty*, and rests satisfied? It is not, manifestly, because we have a distinct perception of the *nature* of the objects of the enquiry (for that is precluded by the supposition, and, indeed, by the preceding statement); but because we *have* such a distinct perception of the *relation* those objects bear one toward another, and can assign positively, without danger of error, the exact relation,

as to identity or diversity, the quantities before us, at every step of the process. Mathematics is not the science which enables us to ascertain the nature of things in themselves;—for that alas! is not a science which can be learned in our present imperfect condition, where we see “through a glass darkly;”—but the science of quantity as measurable, that is, as *comparable*: and it is obvious, that we can compare quantities satisfactory in some respects, while we know nothing of them in the others. Thus we can demonstrate, that any two sides of a plane triangle are, together, greater than the third, by showing that angles of whose absolute magnitude we *know nothing*, are one greater than the other; and then inferring the truth of the proposition, from the previously demonstrated proposition, that the greater angle in a triangle is subtended by the greater side. So again, when we affirm that between any two consecutive terms of the natural series of whole numbers, there may be interposed an indefinite number of magnitudes which are not fractional, the reason at first revolts as if we proposed an absurdity; for it seems repugnant to the

first principles of common sense that between 99 and 100, for example, it should be possible to interpose a multitude of numbers, none of which can be correctly represented by either 99 *plus* a fraction, or 100 *minus* a fraction. Yet far from involving absurdity, the proposition is so strictly true, that we cannot refute it without rasing to its foundation all mathematical science. For, it is demonstrable that the square roots of 9802, 9803, 9804, 9805, &c. to 10000, are each, in succession, greater than the former; and the first of them greater than 99. In like manner we can prove that the cube roots of 860300, 860301, 860302, &c. to 1000000, are each in succession greater than the former; that the cube root of 860300, the smallest of them, while it exceeds 99, is less than the square root of 9802. In like manner we can assign separate series of biquadrate and sursolid roots still more numerous than the square and cube roots, all of which shall be demonstrably unequal to each other, shall be interposed in point of numerical value between 99 and 100, and yet shall, *none* of them, be correctly expressible either by the *sum* of 99 and a fraction, or by

the *difference* of 100 and a fraction. Here, then, reason must bend, put on the "inevitable chains," and feel itself constrained, not merely to acknowledge the existence of those incommensurables which are neither fractional nor integral numbers, but also that while they are unsusceptible of precise appreciation, they admit of as accurate comparison as any other mathematical quantities. No mathematician can tell the precise value of $\sqrt{2}$ or $\sqrt{5}$; every one can tell the precise value of $\sqrt{4}$ or $\sqrt{9}$: no one, notwithstanding, will hesitate longer to declare that $\sqrt{5}$ exceeds $\sqrt{2}$, than to declare that $\sqrt{9}$ exceeds $\sqrt{4}$, that is, that 3 is greater than 2.

Once more, we cannot possibly *know* ALL the terms of the infinite series

$$\frac{1}{a} - \frac{c}{a^2} + \frac{c^2}{a^3} - \frac{c^3}{a^4} + \frac{c^4}{a^5} - , \text{ \&c. in } \textit{infn.}$$

because such knowledge implies a contradiction: neither can we know all the terms of the infinite series

$$\frac{1}{c} - \frac{a}{c^2} + \frac{a^2}{c^3} - \frac{a^3}{c^4} + \frac{a^4}{c^5} - , \text{ \&c.}$$

yet we can show that these series are equal. For we can demonstrate that the first series is

an expanded function, standing with the quantity $\frac{1}{a+c}$ in the relation of equality: we can likewise demonstrate, that the second series bears the relation of equality with the quantity $\frac{1}{c+a}$: and although we can have but a vague idea even of the quantities $\frac{1}{c+a}$ and $\frac{1}{a+c}$, while a and c stand as general representatives of *any* quantities; yet those fractions must necessarily be equal, and thence we infer the like equality between the sums of the two infinite series. In a similar manner we can have no clear conception of the nature of the quantities \sqrt{a} , \sqrt{b} , &c.; yet we are as certain that $\sqrt{a} = \sqrt{b} \times \sqrt{\frac{a}{b}}$, as that $20 + 30 = 50$: since we can demonstrate that equality subsists in the former expression as completely as we can in the latter, both being referable to an intuitive truth. Every mathematician can demonstrate strictly that the conclusions he obtains by means of these quantities, though he cannot comprehend them in themselves, must *necessarily* be true: he therefore acts wisely when he uses them, since they facilitate his inquiries; and, knowing that

their relations are *real*, he is satisfied, because it is only in those *relations* that he is interested.

To you my friend, who are so conversant with mathematical subjects, this enumeration of particulars would be perfectly unnecessary, were it not in order to recommend that similar principles to those which I have here traced be adopted, when *religious* topics are under investigation. We cannot comprehend the nature of an infinite series, so far as that nature depends upon an acquaintance with each term; but we *know* the relation which subsists between it and the radix from which it is expanded: we cannot comprehend the nature of the impossible quantities $\sqrt{-a}$, $\sqrt{-b}$, &c.; but we *know* their relation to one another, and to other algebraic quantities. In like manner (though I should scarcely presume to state such a comparison, but for the important practical inference which it furnishes), we cannot, with our limited faculties, comprehend the infinite perfections of the Supreme Being, or reconcile his different attributes, as to see distinctly how “mercy and peace are met together, righteousness and truth have embraced each other; or how the Majestic

Governor of the universe can be every where present, yet not exclude other beings ; but we know, or at least *may* know (if we do not despise and reject the information graciously vouchsafed to us by the God of truth), his relation to us, as *our* Father, *our* Guide, and *our* Judge.—We cannot comprehend the nature of the Messiah, as revealed to us in his twofold character of “the Son of God,” and the “Man Christ Jesus;” but we know the relation in which he stands to us as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and as he “who was wounded for *our* transgressions, who was bruised for our iniquities, and by whose stripes *we* are healed:”—Again, we cannot comprehend, perhaps, why the introduction of moral evil should be permitted by him “who *hateth* iniquity;” but we know, in relation to ourselves, that he hath provided a way for *our* escape from the punishment due to sin (which way if we lose, the fault is entirely our own),—and therefore, though we cannot comprehend and explain it so as to silence all cavillers, yet we have abundant reason to “glory in the *mystery* of Reconciliation.” By pursuing this current of reflection farther, and running

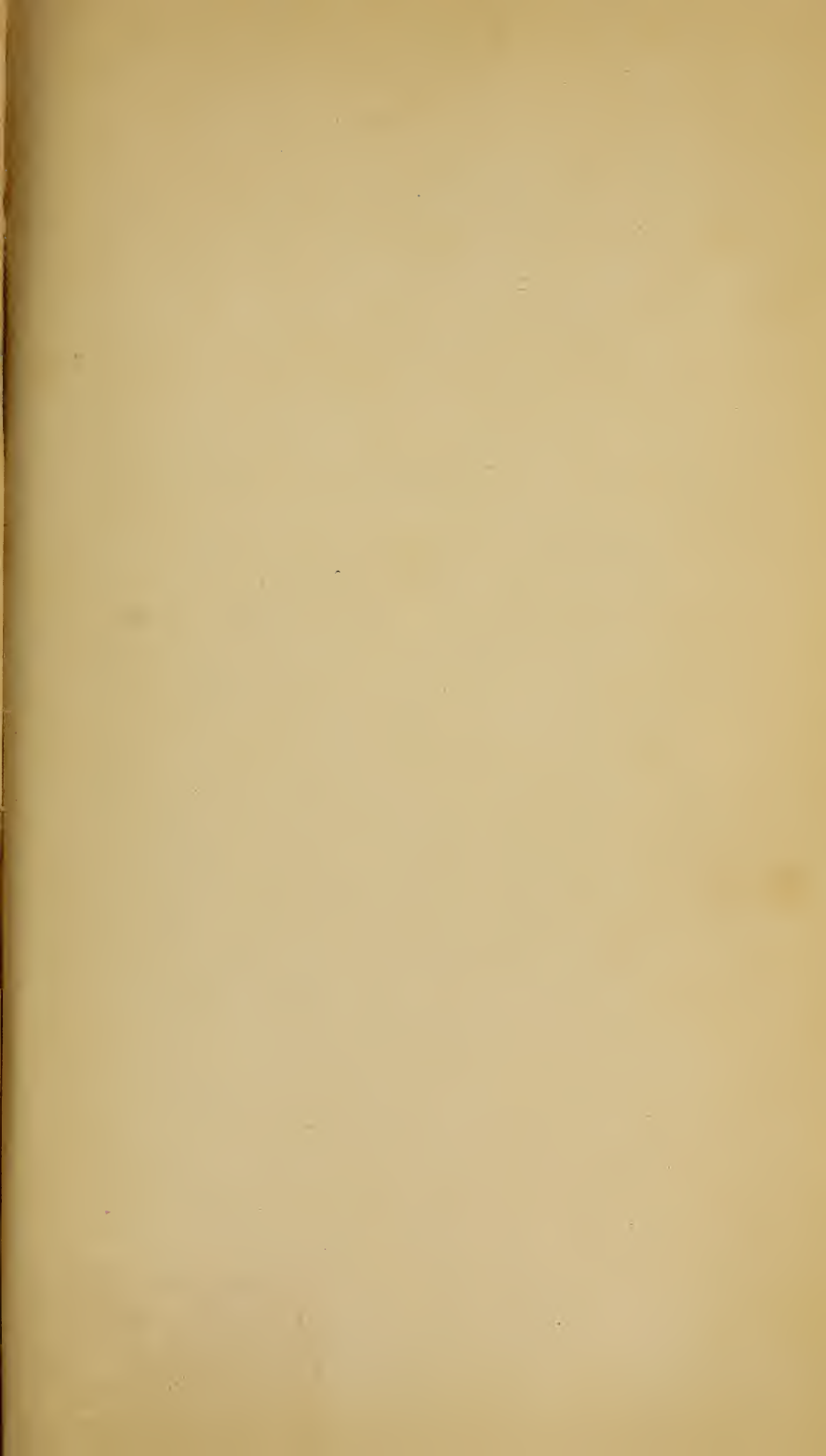
over the general principles of other branches of mathematical, chemical, and metaphysical science than I have here adverted to, you will still find, I am persuaded, that the result of the inquiry will come in aid of our religious belief, by showing that the difficulties attending Christianity are of the same kind (and probably should be referred to the same cause, the weakness of our faculties) as those which envelope all the fundamental principles of knowledge.

Olinthus Gregory's Letters.

FINIS.

Errata.

At page iii	line 12 for	Imposter	read	Impostor
8	5	so is in fact	so, is, in fact,	
	21	light	life	
16	17	were	where	
17	24	fulfillment	fulfilment	
24	18	imposter	impostor	
	21	imposter	impostor	
27	9	fulfillment	fulfilment	
28	note line 7	absurdity. Although } {	absurdity, although	
		true; and	true. And	
33	line 1	mislead	misled	
35 to 40	heading	<i>A Christian</i>	<i>The Christian</i>	
51	line 8	behooves	behoves	
53	7	natute	nature	
61	note line 3	<i>Purke's</i>	<i>Persees</i>	
63	2	were	where	
80	line 16	groupe	group	
92	22	seperate	separate	
100	5	paralized	paralyzed	
105	25	per	pre	
106	10	invole	involve	
108	6	trueism	truism	
111	7	surmisses	surmises	
	14	irresistable	irresistible	
	19	to	so	
133	21	indestructable	indestructible	
147	14	omit <i>we</i>		



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